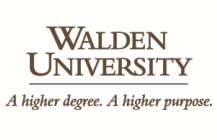

2016

Factors that Cause Repeated Referral to the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program

Koury A. Avery
Walden University

Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Koury Avery

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Review Committee
Dr. Jenelle Braun-Monegan, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Tom Cavanagh, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Sydney Parent, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2016

Abstract

Factors that Cause Repeated Referral to the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program

by

Koury Avery

MA, Prairie View A & M University, 2006

BS, Texas Woman's University, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2016

Abstract

Students are referred to alternative schools such as the Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) for violations against the student code of conduct. Students who are referred and attend DAEPs are more likely to make failing grades and drop out of school permanently. However, a lack of understanding existed about why some students repeatedly receive referrals to the DAEP.The purpose of this case study was to gain an understanding about why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP in a school district in north central Texas. The conceptual framework was based on Catalano and Hawkins' social development theory which posited that through consistent socialization, children learn prosocial or antisocial behavior patterns from the social units to which they are bonded. In this study, 14 purposefully selected classroom teachers participated in one-on-one conversational interviews to explore teachers' perceptions about why some students are repeatedly sent to the DAEP. Inductive analysis was used for coding and identifying emerging concepts, themes, and events. Six major themes emerged from analysis of the data: school structure, classroom/behavior management, class size, student labeling, extracurricular activities, and teacher-student relationships. The results illustrate the need for changes to disciplinary policies, new transition procedures, and improved staff training. This study may contribute to positive social change by suggesting strategies that schools could use to decrease the number of referrals to the DAEP. In turn, by decreasing the number of referrals school failure and dropout rates would decrease and as a result enable youth to eventually become productive members of society.

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Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral research study to my maternal grandmother, Eva Mae Granno McGuire. My Granno was my biggest fan. She never said it to anyone, but I know I was her favorite grandchild. She had me spoiled rotten! And she meant the world to me! Although Alzheimers took her memory away many years before she went home to be with the Lord, I would sometimes see a look in her eyes that told me she recognized me when I walked into her room. Even though her memory was gone before I received any of my college degrees, I know she is in heaven bragging to all of her friends about her favorite grandchild becoming Dr. Avery.

This study is also dedicated to my paternal grandmother, Earline Spence. She didn't have me spoiled like Granno did, but I know she loved me very much. Two of her other granddaughters (my cousins) lived with her, but she never treated me any differently when I came over. I called her Earline until my son came along, and then we both called her Ms. Spence. I remember she would tease me for having to use a recipe book to cook dinner when I first got married. Even after I had been married for more than fifteen years, she was still asking me if had to use a recipe when she would come over for dinner. I wish she was still here to make jokes about my cooking skills. I really miss those days.

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Table of Contents

Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Educators are striving to understand why a vast number of students are not successful in mainstream classrooms. The concept of alternative education was adopted to alleviate the concerns with educating children. Throughout the United States, school districts are relying on alternative school settings also known as Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs) to help educate youths who are unable to succeed in their regular schools. Unlike alternative schools that focus on academics or therapy, DAEPs focus on the needs of seriously disruptive students (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cable, Plucker, & Spradlin, 2009; Metze, 2012; Oscos-Sanchez, Lesser, & Oscos-Flores, 2013). Students may not choose to attend a DAEP, but must be referred by an administrator at the regular school campus (Obleton, Reames, & Kochan, 2012). A student can receive multiple DAEP referrals in the same school year. In the school district represented in this study, a large number of students are removed from their home schools due to repeated referrals to the DAEP for disruptive behaviors.

The number of DAEPs has steadily increased for more than a 10-year span due to a surge in the number of students referred to the DAEP since its first year of operation (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cole & Heilig, 2011; Cortez & Cortez, 2009). In addition, there was a 37.6 % increase in assignments to the DAEP, some of which were repeated referrals, from 1996 to 2006 (Cortez & Cortez, 2009). Approximately 33% of the total number of DAEP assignments was received by students who had repeated disciplinary referrals during the same year (Cortez & Cortez, 2009). Because of the excessive number

of school children receiving multiple disciplinary referrals to the study site, the goal of this study was to explore teacher perspectives about why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP while other students are not. In this study, I investigated factors that cause some students to continue to be removed from mainstream education. If school districts understand why some students receive repeated referrals to the DAEP, then districts can make the necessary changes to schools for students to be successful at their home schools.

Problem Statement

There is a lack of understanding about why some students repeatedly receive referrals to the DAEP. Students are assigned to alternative schools for violations against the district's student code of conduct. How long a student is suspended from the home school and enrolled at the alternative school is governed by the severity of the violation. After completing their days at the DAEP, students are able to re-enroll at their regular schools. According to V. Smith, the intake specialist at the alternative school that was used in this study, students often times return to the alternative school within 30 days after going back to their home schools (personal communication, March 4, 2015). In addition, Smith stated, "sadly, some students return two to three times during a school year." Smith further asserted that some students are assigned to the alternative school at least one time year after year. Administrators repeatedly send students to the DAEP not realizing the negative consequences that the reassignment may have for the students. Those consequences include increased dropping out, disruptive behavior, and numerous

psychological issues (Cole & Heilig, 2011; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Shollenberger, 2013).

Schools in the United States seek a practical method to keep schools in order and safe by implementing zero tolerance practices that result in suspensions to disciplinary alternative education programs (Skiba, 2010). Schools continue to suspend students in overwhelming numbers in response to students' negative behaviors (Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010). Students who are suspended for misconduct and aggression receive assignments to disciplinary alternative programs to ensure a safe school environment for all students (Kralevich, Slate, Tejada-Delgado, & Kelsey, 2010). Fite et al. (2011) and Geronimo (2010) agreed that using suspension as a disciplinary consequence adds to the probability that a student will turn out to be delinquent; however, suspension continues to be the primary disciplinary action for schools across the nation. In addition, being suspended is negatively correlated with dropping out of school (Cole & Heilig, 2011; Skiba, 2010) and academic failure (Arcia, 2006; Gregory et al., 2010).

In this case study, I examined repeated referrals to DAEPs. Several studies have been conducted regarding the usage of DAEPs as a common system of discipline for disruptive students (Kralevich et al., 2010; Reyes, 2006; Tajalli & Garba, 2014). Other scholars have analyzed whether or not DAEPs are effective (Aron, 2006; Castleberry & Enger, 1998; Cox, 1999; Kleiner et al., 2002; Quinn et al., 2006; Te Riele, 2007). However, researchers have not conducted a study using teacher perspectives about why some students are repeatedly being sent to DAEPs.

Nature of the Study

The current study was conducted as a qualitative case study. According to Creswell (2013), "case study research is a qualitative approach in which the researcher uses multiple sources to examine a single case or multiple cases in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the case or cases being studied" (p. 18). A case study was selected as a means to gain a detailed understanding of teacher perspectives about why some students are repeatedly sent to the DAEP. Fourteen teachers were purposefully selected to participate in the study. I accessed public information on the school district's website to find possible participants. All schools in the district send students to the same DAEP. Three middle schools were chosen for the study. Three teachers were selected from each of those schools, as well as five teachers from the DAEP. This alternative school is the DAEP where the students from these three schools are sent for committing infractions against the district's code of conduct.

One-on-one conversational interviews were held with the home school and DAEP teachers outside of school hours at a location away from the schools. I attained consent from each participant to record the interviews. The interviews enabled me to determine the teachers' feelings and perceptions about why some students are repeatedly sent to the DAEP. To analyze and interpret the data, I used qualitative analyses. The findings of the study were reviewed by two recent doctoral graduates, and detailed descriptions of the data are reported later in order to ensure the quality of the study. To further ensure quality, I used member checks throughout the course of the study. A more thorough account of the nature of the study is given in Section 3.

Research Question

The research question that guided the study was the following:

1. How do a select group of teachers describe why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP?

Purpose of the Study

The intent of the study was to attain awareness about why some students were repeatedly being sent to the DAEP. The goal of this research was to reveal teacher perceptions about what was causing some students to be sent to the DAEP repeatedly.

Conceptual Framework

This study was grounded on the social development model (SDM), which theorizes how relationships and socialization affect the behavior of children (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). The model is grounded on the idea that the behavior patterns of children, whether prosocial or antisocial, are learned through interactions with the social environments in which they interact. Children develop bonds and attachments to their social units when they are given opportunities to be involved in the unit, when they have the skills to be involved in the unit, and when they are acknowledged for their involvement in the unit (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2005). Establishing a social bond with a socializing unit encourages individuals to indulge in behaviors that conform to the norms, values, and beliefs accepted by the socializing unit (Duerden & Witt, 2010). Catalano and Hawkins (1996) theorized that a child will learn prosicial behavior when the behaviors, norms, and values exhibited by the socializing unit are prosocial. Similarly, a child will

learn antisocial behavior when the behaviors, norms, and values of the socializing unit are antisocial. Children become bonded to many socializing units; however, the most important socializing units tend to be their family members, schools, peer relationships, and communities. One of the most vital prosocial relationships an individual can have is the bond to school, which is a safeguard from antisocial behavior.

According to the SDM, children who develop an attachment to their family members are unlikely to indulge in antisocial behaviors because those behaviors do not warrant rewards and may jeopardize their family relationships (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004). Likewise, adolescents who have an attachment to school or school personnel, such as a teacher or coach, are discouraged from associating with deviant peers in order to protect their existing relationships and rewards connected to school staff or other peers who also have an attachment to school (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). Prosocial relationships in which children adopt the behavior values and beliefs of their family members and schools dictate behavior patterns for the future. Contrarily, individuals who do not have prosocial bonds are more inclined to participate in antisocial activities and to associate with troublemaking peers (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). Furthermore, a close relationship with deviant peers will result in an individual developing a bond with these peers and engaging in antisocial activities (Cleveland, Feinberg, Botempo, & Greenberg, 2008; Dishion & Owen, 2002).

Operational Definitions

The subsequent definitions need to be understood for this study:

Alternative school: Schools established for individuals that cannot achieve success in a regular school. Alternative school students are generally those that have been labeled at risk (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010).

At-risk: A term used with respect to a school-aged children who may experience failure in school, uses drugs or alcohol, is expecting a child or has a child, has a juvenile record, has been retained at least once, does not speak English proficiently, is a part of a gang, has experienced dropping out, or is truant (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2011).

Attachment: The bond that develops between individuals and the social units they consistently interact with (Ekeh, 2012).

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs): The programs intended to support individuals who are suspended from their regular schools as a result of infractions against their districts code of conduct (Darensbourg, Perez, & Blake, 2010).

Disciplinary referral: A recommendation to a DAEP for behaviors prohibited by the school district which causes placement in an alternative setting (Cole & Heilig, 2011).

Expulsion: A procedural method of exclusionary discipline that uses an extended amount of time out of school. A student can be expelled for an entire school year. Expulsions are not used as often as suspensions, and the decision to expel typically comes from the superintendent (Welch & Payne, 2012).

Juvenile delinquency: Involvement in unlawful behavior by an individual who has not reached the legal age limit (Siegel & Welsh, 2013).

Juvenile justice system: The entities of the law, such as the police and the courts, that are responsible for providing services to youthful offenders (Siegel & Welsh, 2013).

Mainstream school: The regular school an individual is referred from as a result of a behavior infraction (Geronimo, 2010).

Office referral: A recommendation to the principal or principal designee, primarily for behaviors that demonstrate nonconformity to school rules or being disrespectful to school personnel (O'Farrell & Redding, 2013).

School attachment: A term used to describe the emotional bond an individual has with the school environment (Wei & Chen, 2010).

School commitment: References the level of a student's investment in school and desire to do well in school (Monahan, Oesterle, & Hawkins, 2010).

Student code of conduct: The guidelines implemented by a school district to inform students and parents of the districts' behavioral expectations for students, and the possible consequences for not adhering to these rules (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

Suspension: The procedures schools use to remove students from school for disruptive and dangerous behaviors (Losen & Skiba, 2010).

Assumptions

It was assumed that enough teacher participants could be recruited in order to get meaningful results. A second assumption was that teachers would be enthusiastic about participating in the study and have faith that it will be beneficial to their students. A third assumption was that teachers would answer all interview questions openly and honestly. Furthermore, it was assumed that substantial data would be collected, and an exploration of the interviews would lead to substantial findings.

Limitations

The study was limited in that I did not have any control over how many teachers were willing to participate. The next limitation was that I taught at the DAEP, and therefore, had preconceived ideas about the study. Furthermore, I understood that a single study of this nature was not sufficient enough to effectively indicate what causes students to be repeatedly sent to alternative schools. A duplicate study needs to be conducted to definitely conclude if those problems exist. The study was limited because only teacher perspectives were examined. Another limitation was that the outcomes of this study were solely grounded on the perspectives of teachers who worked at a particular school district. Consequently, no generalizations about the results can be made to other districts.

Scope and Delimitations

Teacher perspectives were the center of the study. No other perspectives, such as students or parents, were considered for the study. Teachers at the DAEP and at the home schools were asked questions about teacher-student relationships, how students felt about school, and the school climate. The outcomes of the study are only applicable to those individuals who have been sent to this particular alternative school from three mainstream schools in the district.

Significance of the Study

An exploration into the causes of students being repeatedly sent to alternative schools is important for several reasons. First, the study could provide awareness to all stakeholders who have an investment in how to better help youth be successful in school.

Next, addressing these issues could lead to more instructional time spent in regular school classrooms, less suspensions, decreased dropout rates, and higher graduation rates.

Schools, family, community, and peers can contribute to students being removed from mainstream education (Seydlitz & Jenkins, 1998). This research study provided data to schools about what teachers believe to be the reasons some students repeatedly receive referrals to DAEPS. Going to a disciplinary alternative school does not usually lead to outcomes as good as staying in their home schools. Youth who attend DAEPs are likelier to experience school failure (Arcia, 2006; Burke, Oats, & Ringke, 2011; Kralevich et al., 2010) and dropping out (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cole & Heilig, 2011; Skiba et. al, 2010). Therefore, if schools lessen the number of student discipline referrals, far fewer students could be sent to the alternative schools, which would lead to a reduction in school failure and dropout rates. A decrease in school failure and dropout rates could enable more youths to eventually become productive members of society.

Summary

In this section, I presented a synopsis of the study. I described the problem addressed, the purpose of the study, the framework that the study was based on, operational definitions, assumptions of the study, limitations of the study, scope and delimitations of the study, and the significance of the study. Also included were the research questions and an account of the techniques used to collect data in addition to a brief synopsis of the techniques used to analyze the data.

Section 2 will provide a summary of the existing literature associated with the study. In the literature review, I concentrate on how DAEPs began and factors associated

with referrals to the DAEP. Section 3 will include an exhaustive interpretation of the methodology employed in the study. Specifically, I will identify the research design, research question, setting, sample, how participants were protected, the role of the researcher, and a comprehensive depiction of the techniques that were employed to collect and analyze data. In addition, the methods to address validity will be explained in this section. In Section 4, I summarize the outcomes of the study. Section 5 will include discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for the study.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Of all the challenges educators face, the most prevalent is how to ensure that children across the world receive a quality education. Educators have not been able to understand why some students cannot succeed in regular school settings. According to scholars, the number of suspensions has rapidly increased throughout the United States (Kim, Losen, & Hewitt, 2010; Losen & Skiba, 2010). As a result, alternative education has appeared to help alleviate this problem with student suspensions.

In this section, I offer an examination of literature related to the factors contributing to repeated referrals to DAEPs. The literature review starts with an explanation of the conceptual framework of the study. An examination of the history of alternative schools/programs is presented next. Then, I present the definition of alternative schools/programs. Following the definition of alternative schools is a section on how the number of alternative schools has increased over time. Next is a section describing at-risk students. Zero tolerance policies are also examined. Because the study took place in a school district in Texas, DAEPs in Texas are discussed. Next, I describe the two types of referrals students receive that result in placement in a DAEP. After referrals, I describe DAEP student populations. In the next two sections, I discuss the purpose and effectiveness of DEAP referrals and suspensions. Next, I examine factors that researchers have attributed to problem behaviors and putting youth at risk of being removed from regular school classrooms. Lastly, student outcomes associated with DAEP referrals/suspensions are discussed.

The strategy used for searching the literature involved obtaining peer-reviewed journal articles and previously submitted dissertations. The Walden Library provided access to several databases, such as ERIC, Education Research Complete, and Education from Sage, to name a few. Google Scholar was also used to retrieve journal articles. In addition, books from the local public library were used as well as course textbooks from Walden and previously attended schools. To search for literature within the databases, several key terms and phrases were used, including *alternative schools, disciplinary alternative education programs, delinquency, disruptive behavior, school factors, effectiveness of DAEPs, student outcomes, school climate, suspension, mandatory referral, discretionary referral, zero tolerance,* and *at-risk students.* These searches yielded about 200 journal articles, books, dissertations, and reports, although all the literature reviewed was not relevant to the present study.

Conceptual Framework

This study was based on Catalano and Hawkins' (1996) conceptual framework, the SDM. The SDM is a combined theory that explains how children develop prosocial and antisocial behaviors over time based on the relationships and processes in which they socialize (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). The model states that when children socialize with prosocial individuals and institutions they are provided rewards for displaying prosocial behaviors which results in increasing the probability of duplicating those antisocial behaviors in the future (Sullivan & Hirschfield, 2011) . Similarly, when children have close relationships with other antisocial individuals and

institutions they are rewarded for displaying antisocial behaviors which makes it challenging to refrain from further antisocial behaviors (Roosa et al., 2011).

The main socializing units children bond with include families, schools, peer relationships, and communities (Catalano & Hawkins, 2006). The social development model has implications for repeated referrals to the DAEP because when youths feel bonded to school or school staff, they are less likely to display deviant, disruptive, or delinquent behaviors that cause them to be removed from the mainstream school setting (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2011; Freidenfelt Liljeberg, Eklund, Vafors Fritz, and af Klinteberg, 2011; Gregory et al., 2010). Gregory et al. (2010) found that children who have weak bonds with school are likelier to participate in unlawful activities and will probably not be successful in school.

The school is one of the most important prosocial socializing units that can prevent antisocial conduct and encourage positive childhood development. Freidenfelt Liljeberg et al. (2011) found that delinquency for boys was significantly associated with all three dimensions of school bonding, meaning boys who were most delinquent described a low attachment to school, a low commitment to school, and a low attachment to the teacher. However, delinquency for girls was associated with teacher attachment, meaning girls who were most delinquent reported that they did not feel like they had positive relationships with their teachers (Freidenfelt Liljeberg et al., 2011). Similarly, Demanet and Van Houtte (2011) conveyed that students who felt that their teachers supported them tended to abide by school rules and that feeling of being supported could

offset the effects of deviant peers. If teachers want to help dissuade misconduct, it is essential for them to make sure that their students know they support them at school.

The SDM was relevant to this study because it highlights the association between learned behavior—prosocial or antisocial—and social environment. Antisocial behaviors are those that cause students to be removed from mainstream classrooms and receive referrals to DAEPs, and the social environment is the school students are being removed from. According to the model, when socializing is consistent between individuals and their social environment, a social bond of attachment develops and inhibits behaviors that do not conform to the beliefs of the environment (Roosa et al., 2010). Many youth are being repeatedly removed to the DAEP, implying that those students are not bonded or attached to their schools or school personnel. Therefore, the SDM informed this study in determining teacher perspectives on why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP.

History of Alternative Education

Alternative education programs (schools) first came to fruition in the United States in the 1960s (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010). Loflin (2007) proposed that the leading reason that alternative schools were developed was because a particular group of students were not being appropriately educated. The mainstream public educational system was accused of being prejudiced and only concerned about the achievement of a small group of individuals (Lange & Sletten, 2002). The aim of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act was to highlight merit as opposed to fairness (Standerfer, 2006). Towards

the end of the 60s, the alternative movement had divided into two general groups: the private system and the public system.

In the private sector, two types of alternatives emerged. The aim of *Freedom Schools* was to offer better education services to minority students than they received from the public schools (Lange & Sletten, 2002). According to Martin (2012), the Freedom School movement is one in which "pupils and teachers collectively run the education process, deciding on methods and content of learning" (p. 57).

The second type of alternative education in the private sector, the *Free School Movement*, was centered around individual accomplishment and gratification, as opposed to putting emphasis on community (Kim, 2011). These schools were established on the basis that the regular public school system was hindering and impeding a large group of individuals and that the design of schools should permit students to be free to demonstrate their intellectual capabilities (Lange & Sletten, 2002). The purpose of Free schools was to provide students the freedom to acquire knowledge and the freedom from limitations (Cable et al., 2009).

In the public sector, alternative programs were regarded as open schools (Tissington, 2006). These nontraditional schools were based on student choice and offered a child-centered curriculum (Lang & Sletten, 2002; Young, 1990). Open schools inspired the establishment of additional alternative schools in the public school system, such as schools that don't have walls, schools included in an existing school, culturally diverse schools, schools based on student continuance, and schools for advanced students (Obleton et al., 2012). However, many of these alternative schools did not survive for

several different reasons, including financial issues, a lack of a universal belief system, and the weight of the demands from the community for school accountability (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

By the late 1980s, the rationale for public alternative schools began to change. The progressive ideas of the 1970s were fading. The conventional educational climate of these new schools was attracting a different a type of student (Young, 1990). According to Young (1990), an increasing number of alternative schools were created to serve disruptive students during the 1980s and that change influenced the character of many alternative options. Raywid (1999) suggested that alternative schools were more concerned with students being taught fundamentals and less interested in the decision-making process.

Definition of Alternative Education

Administrators, researchers, and policymakers have not been able to agree upon a mutual definition of alternative education (Atkins & Bartuska, 2010; Cable et al., 2009; Tissington, 2006). Likely, a common definition has not been accepted because there is not a particular organization that can take sole responsibility for alternative education (Mills & McGregor, 2016). However, there are several different approaches that have helped shape alternative education.

Smith (1974) described an alternative school as one that offers educational services that cannot be attained from the regular schools in its community to any student, free of charge. Morley (1991) stated that alternative schools are grounded on the notion that learning can occur in numerous ways and that this learning can occur in several

different situations. In addition, the Department of Education described an alternative school as

> A public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education. (as cited in Jones, 2011, p. 220)

Similarly, Yearwood, Jibril-Abdum, and Jordan (2002) surmised that alternative schools primarily help kids who are truant, in jeopardy of dropping out, failing in school, and display antisocial behaviors. According to DeBlois and Place (2007), alternative education settings enable students to feel like they belong to a community by offering small classes. Carver et al. (2010) posited that alternative programs offer additional educational opportunities in an alternative setting to individuals who are not succeeding in the regular classroom; may have a learning disability, emotional problems, behavior issues; or who may be affected by other students' behavior. According to Acker (2007), the aim of alternative schools is to offer an environment that is beneficial to learning and to establish an environment that promotes acceptance, leadership, and success.

Obleton, Reames, and Kochan (2012) recognized three types of alternative schools using the typology first developed by Raywid (1994). Type I programs are schools that students can choose to attend, such as magnet schools, that give emphasis to advanced teaching methods and approaches. Type II programs are those that students may be removed to as a last resort, instead of being expelled. The third program type,

Type III, have a therapeutic environment aimed at helping students who have emotional problems or need help developing social skills.

Alternative education has many connotations. The alternative school relevant to this study is one that Obleton et al. (2012) and Raywid (1994) would categorize as Type II, having been established for forced placement. The students assigned to this alternative school have been removed from their home schools for violations against the districts' code of conduct, such as bullying, fighting, too many referrals, assault on personnel, suspicion of substance use, and possession of a substance.

Increase in Alternative Education Programs

Since the mid-1990s, an increasing number of DAEPs have been established due to the increasing number of students being removed from mainstream schools (Lagana-Riordan et al., 2011). During the 1993-1994 school years, 2,606 alternative schools were reportedly being operated independently from regular schools (Foley & Pang, 2006). Within 4 years, there were 3,850 alternative schools in operation, indicating a 47% increase (Carver et al., 2010). Kim and Taylor (2008) reported that during the 2000-2001 school years, 613,000 at-risk students attended alternative schools. A few years later, an Urban Institute study showed that the number of students being sent to alternative schools was constantly growing (as cited in Aron, 2006). Furthermore, the total number of assignments to alternative schools in 2007-2008 had risen to 646,500 (Carver et al., 2010). Aron (2006) concluded that even though no record can be found of the exact number or kinds of alternative schools, it was estimated that more than 20,000 are in operation across the nation. The National Center for Educational Statistics further

suggested that these programs serve conservatively well over 600,000 students (as cited in Jones, 2011).

Kim and Taylor (2008) asserted that the rise in the number of alternative education settings is associated with the growing population of at-risk children. Tobin and Sprague (2000) believed that the rise in alternative schools was caused by an increased reliance on zero tolerance policies, modifications in the laws associated with special education, violent youth, and improved awareness of how to recognize at-risk adolescents. According to Carver et al. (2010), the number of alternative schools has risen because programs are offering services to younger students. Furthermore, Verdugo and Glenn (2006) attributed the sizeable growth in alternative schools to the mounting population of minority students being punished by school officials.

At-Risk Students

The word at-risk was originally coined to describe patterns of medical disease within a country (Mitchell, 2000). However, Gardner (1983) used the term to describe an increasing number of troubled adolescents in the United States. Almost immediately after this, the education and social science fields adopted the term at-risk to describe troubled adolescent students (Franklin, 2000; Mitchell, 2000; Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2003).

Researchers have not instituted an official definition of an at-risk student. For instance, Beken, Williams, Combs, and Slate (2009) described at-risk students as those who are at a disadvantage in achieving academic and social goals due to special challenges and backgrounds. Other researchers defined at-risk as a method to describe children who do not have academic success and are susceptible to dropping out (Cable et

al., 2009). Students who drop out of school tend to drop out after being separated from school for an extensive amount of time often due to failing a grade, learning disabilities, excessive absences, or negative school experiences (Bowers, 2010; Bowers, Sprott, & Taff, 2013; Cable et al., 2009). Hixson stated that students become at-risk when the school is not willing to accommodate their needs and support their social and emotional development (as cited in Treffinger, 2013, p. 82).

Conrath (1986) defined at-risk as "defeated and discouraged learners" (p. 12). Conrath further described them as

> having low self-confidence, having a deep sense of personal impotency, helplessness and lack of self-worth; they are avoiders; they distrust adults and adult situations; they have a limited notion of the future; they usually lack adequate educational skills; most come from unstable homes; they are impatient with sitting for extended periods of time, listening, classes that lack variation; they learn best through practical application; and they do not understand that effort is associated with achievement. (p.12)

Many environmental, social, and cultural factors have been associated with becoming at-risk: (a) being considered a minority or being identified as part of a particular ethnicity, (b) having a low socioeconomic background, (c) coming from a single parent home, (d) having a parent with little or no education, (e) living in a non-English speaking home, (f) coming from a poor neighborhood, (g) living in a neighborhood with a high violence rate, and (h) being homeless or a teenage parent (Gavigan & Kurtts, 2010). Several of these factors are used by entities across the United

States to categorize and assist individuals who have been determined to be at-risk (Beken et al., 2009).

According to Gavigan and Kurtts (2010), an at-risk student is a student

1. Who has been retained from going to the next grade
2. Who has not met expectancy on state tests
3. Who is not passing two or more classes with at least a 70
4. Who is pregnant
5. Who has a child
6. Who has been placed in a DAEP
7. Who has been expelled
8. Who is currently on probation
9. Who was previously reported as a drop out
10. Who does not speak English proficiently
11. Who is in custodial care of Child Protective Services
12. Who is homeless
13. Who resides in a placement facility (p. 10)

The number of at-risk students is increasing; they are often behind academically, have dropped out of school, or have been suspended from the traditional school setting (Royal & Lamport, 2012). Martin and Martin (2000) stated that one in four U.S. adolescents are highly susceptible to risky behaviors and failing in school; approximately 7 million others are moderately at risk (Martin & Martin, 2000). The student population at risk in the public educational system is projected to steadily increase (de la Ossa,

2005). Others have anticipated that by 2020, the bulk of public school students will display characteristics that are normally associated with being at-risk and school failure (Rossi & Stringfield, 1995; Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

Zero Tolerance Policies

Zero tolerance guidelines have been at the center of the discussion about how to discipline kids in school across the nation (Skiba, 2010). Initially intended to aid in the fight against drugs (Lewis, Butler, Bonner III, & Joubert, 2010), schools embraced the policy in the 1990s as a strategy that articulates the preset penalties to be applied with no regard to the severity of the behavior, the reasons why the behavior occurred, or the situation in which the behavior occurred (Astor, Guerra, & Van Acker, 2010; Cramer, Gonzalez, & Pellegrini-Lafont, 2014; Skiba, 2010). Zero tolerance is based on a harsher method of handling school punishments which increased the number of times and the total days an adolescent can be suspended or expelled for a wide-range of behaviors (Skiba, 2014). By applying disciplinary consequences to minor and serious infractions, zero tolerance aims to "send a message" to prospective troublemakers that misconduct is prohibited (Skiba, p. 28). Zero tolerance policies serve the objective of removing individuals who take part in troublemaking activities to alternative schools to ensure that non-troublemakers can learn. Zero tolerance also aims to remove students who may be dangerous from regular schools in order to provide a safe environment for others to learn. Students who are pushed out of mainstream school because of zero tolerance policies often find themselves in disciplinary alternative education programs (Geronimo, 2010).

New legislation was passed in 1994 which ignited the implementation of zero tolerance guidelines to mandate that students who bring firearms on school campuses be expelled for one year; or else, schools will not receive federal funds (Krezmien, Leone, Zablocki, & Wells, 2010; McNeal & Dunbar, 2010). In compliance with the zero tolerance rules for firearms, kids can be removed from school for minor infractions such as holding their hand like a gun and directing it toward another student (Wittman, 2007). In many districts, zero tolerance guidelines have expanded to encompass additional behaviors such as class disruption, tardiness, truancy, fighting, homework completion, or even off-campus behavior (Follenweider, 2011; Skiba, 2010). For example, an adolescent whose mother was a soldier deployed in Iraq was suspended for not following the rules when he was caught talking on his cell phone—even though he explained that he hadn't talked to her for more than thirty days (Torpy, 2005). In 2009, twenty five African American adolescents went to jail for reckless conduct after being arrested and put in handcuffs for a food fight (Skiba, 2014). In another case, a young student in Pennsylvania was removed from school for having a plastic ax, even though it was a part of his costume for the class Halloween party (Darensbourg et al., 2010). Although the ax was just five inches long and was included with his costume, it was considered a "weapon" and the school was required to suspend the young child. Although these suspensions and expulsions appear to be for apparently trivial reasons, several districts remain consistent with their approach to discipline. These types of occurrences appear to be harsh, but are considered to be necessary in order for zero tolerance to be used as a consistent and effective preventative measure against school misbehavior (American Psychological

Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008). Consequently, students who commit infractions that are subject to punishment under zero tolerance guidelines are considered at risk (Martinez, McMahon, Coker, & Keys, 2016).

After more than a decade of widespread adoption and accurate documentation that student suspensions and expulsions have increased, no evidence has been found to indicate that zero tolerance is effective. For example, Skiba et al. (2006) evaluated zero tolerance guidelines and determined that:

> zero tolerance policies as implemented have failed to achieve the goals of an effective system of school discipline…[they have] not been shown to improve school climate or school safety…[and]…its application in suspension and expulsion has not proven and effective means of improving student behavior. (p. 113)

Morrison (2007) suggested that in addition to zero tolerance being ineffective, it encourages prejudice and discrimination, since it was established to separate students who have social and behavior problems from the mainstream environment.

The School-to-Prison Pipeline

To describe the procedures that remove at-risk students from regular classrooms and place them on the path to a criminal record, the term School to Prison Pipeline is used (Boyd, 2009). The construction of the pipeline has become strongly associated with zero tolerance guidelines, and the increase in the amount of discipline issues arising in the public school systems of the nation. Tuzzolo and Hewitt (2006) confirmed this relationship when they stated, “Across the country, criminal justice advocates, civil and

human rights groups, educators and even law enforcement officials are highlighting the connection between the discipline practices in our schools and the growing number of Americans incarcerated" (p. 61).

Zero tolerance policies were adopted as an avenue of establishing safer schools. Instead, the policies criminalize minor disciplinary infractions. They have caused more students to be at risk for suspension, at risk for expulsion, removed to DAEPs, or to be arrested at school for minor infractions, including subjective offenses, such as "disrespect" or "insubordination," and status offenses such as truancy. Behavior problems that were formerly handled in the principal's office are currently referred to as criminal offenses and police officers are arresting students while they are at school or police reports are filed (Bracy, 2010; Fowler, 2011). Students are being placed in the juvenile or adult criminal justice systems. A lot of students feel like going to school is the same as going to jail.

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs in Texas

In 1995, Texas legislation made it mandatory for all school districts to implement an alternative educational setting for behavioral management (Texas Education Agency (TEA), 2010). While putting this plan into place, educationalists and lawmakers agreed that disorderly students needed to be taken out of mainstream classrooms, but they were skeptical about adopting guidelines that enabled students to be suspended or expelled without a suitable alternate place to learn (Fabelo et al., 2011). As a result of the legislation, DAEPs were established to ensure that students continue to be educated

during their suspensions. In 1997, the legislature revised the law to require creation of DAEPs at places other than the student's home campus (Cortez & Montecel, 1999).

According to the Texas Education Code (TEC), 37.008, every school district must offer a DAEP that:

1. is offered at a different location than the student's regular classroom;
2. takes place at the home school campus or away from the home school campus;
3. arranges for students completing DAEP assignments to be in separate classes from students not completing DAEP assignments;
4. offers the four basic core subjects and behavior management;
5. arranges for students' scholastic and social needs to be met;
6. offers counseling services;
7. employs only highly qualified teachers in accordance with Subchapter B, Chapter 21; and
8. assures that instruction is provided on a daily basis for the amount of time required by the state (TEA, 2010, p. 17).

Texas Education Code 37.008 specifies that it is mandatory for any student who is six years old or older to be sent to a DAEP if they:

- Commit a felony.
- Assault someone other than a school staff member.
- Assault school staff.
- Make a terroristic threat.

- Are in possession of an illegal substance or drug.
- Sell, give, or deliver alcohol to someone else or consumes an alcoholic beverage.
- Misuse a volatile substance.
- Engage in behavior that includes any form of public lewdness/indecent exposure.
- Engage in retaliation against a staff member at the school.
- Commit a Title 5 felony off campus.
- Knowingly make a false alarm or false report (TEA, 2010, p. 14).

Since lawmakers in Texas enacted new laws in 1995, the number of DAEPs and the students served has increased steadily. As Texas continues to see an increase in DAEPs, so is the nation. "Urban districts, large districts (districts with more than 10,000 students), and districts with high poverty concentrations were more likely than other districts to have alternative schools and programs during the 2000 – 2001 school year" (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

In Texas school districts, students receive referrals to alternative schools excessively more than students in other states (Cole & Heilig, 2011). In 2001, there were more than 600,000 students in the U.S. enrolled in disciplinary alternative education programs and more than 90,000 students in Texas (Gable, Bullock, & Evans, 2006). Since 2001, the number of Texas students enrolled in DAEPs has increased. In 2007-

2008, more than 100,000 students were removed from their regular classrooms and sent to DAEPs (Cole & Heilig, 2011).

In 2006, the Texas Education Agency (2010) reported that nearly thirty percent of the school districts in Texas operated a DAEP. Approximately one-fourth of school districts in Texas gave an account of having a DAEP in operation at a separate location in 2009-2010 (Fabelo, 2011). In Round Rock (ISD), for example, an elementary DAEP is located at one of the mainstream elementary schools, and a separate facility is available for middle and high school DAEP students. During the 2009-2010 school year, Texas public schools reported having a total of 301 DAEPs located away from the regular schools (TEA, 2010). This total included 21 schools for only elementary students, 14 campuses for only middle school students, and 28 campuses for only high school students. The total also included 238 campuses that housed elementary and secondary students.

Mandatory versus Discretionary Referrals/Suspensions

Initially, assignment to a DAEP was considered mandatory for behavior that can be punished under zero tolerance guidelines (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Originally established to allow schools to implement punishment for having a gun on campus, zero tolerance guidelines have extended types of disciplinary actions principals can apply (Calhoun & Pelech, 2010). A variety of disciplinary actions fall under the zero tolerance umbrella, including being suspended, being assigned to a DAEP, being expelled, and being placed in a juvenile detention center. Infractions that require mandatory removal to

a DAEP as a consequence of zero tolerance policies consist of committing a felony, making a terroristic threat, and assaulting or killing someone (Foley & Pang, 2006).

While zero tolerance guidelines have always been the center of debate, a developing result of these mandatory assignment practices also needs to be talked about—the point that a countless number of infractions are currently considered to be unacceptable and cause for assignment to a DAEP (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). This point is most apparent in the increasing number of discretionary DAEP assignments for any kind of "bad" behavior, such as smoking, using drugs, threatening someone, and having a fight (Mitchell, 2010, p. 249). Booker and Mitchell (2011) examined DAEP data from a report that was generated about the school year ending in 2006. The report indicated that 70% of the assignments to DAEPs in Texas were based on discretionary referrals. According to the report, behaviors were distinctly categorized for those considered to be mandatory offenses (p. 194). Alternatively, administrators decide which minor behaviors will result in a discretionary referral to the DAEP, which increases the potential for students to be sent to the alternative program (p. 194). Similarly, Levin (2006) stated it is the principals' discretion whether or not a student will be excluded from regular classes. Furthermore, Levin reported that school districts can issue discretionary referrals for suspensions for any behavior at any time.

Booker and Mitchell (2011) examined data from a 2003 study conducted by Mendez and Knoff at a school district in Florida during the 1996-1997 school year. The authors concluded that the majority of participants included in the study received discretionary referrals. Students in the study were suspended for infractions such as:

"disobedience/insubordination (20%), disruption (13%), fighting (13%), inappropriate behavior (11%), noncompliance with assigned discipline (7%), profanity (7%), disrespect (6%), tobacco possession (4%), battery (3%), threat/intimidation (2%), left class without permission (2%)." Infractions that students received mandatory referrals for were significantly lower with less than 1% each for weapons, narcotics possession, sexual harassment, and alcohol possession (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). McLoughlin and Noltemeyer (2010) reported similar results from an earlier study by Costenbader and Markson in 1998. The researchers discovered several offenses that caused students to be suspended, such as: (a) fighting/physical aggression, (b) being disrespectful, (c) cursing, (d) tardiness, (e) walking out of class, (f) leaving the campus, (g) having a weapon, (h) possessing a controlled substance, and (i) incomplete assignments (Mcloughlin & Noltemeyer, 2010). On the other hand, Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) reported that White students tended to experience suspension for more objectively observable infractions like smoking and destruction of property, while blacks were suspended for behaviors more subjective in nature, such as being disrespectful or threatening appearance. Nonetheless, all of these offenses are considered to be discretionary infractions.

In Texas, infractions that require mandatory referral to a DAEP are defined in the Texas Education Code, Chapter 37 (Cortez & Cortez, 2009). Cortez and Cortez reported that the number of students placed in a DAEP in 1996 had increased by 47% in 2006. From 2007 to 2008, 82% of the students enrolled in DAEPs were there for receiving a discretionary referral and 18% were there for receiving a mandatory referral (Cole &

Heilig, 2011). According to Reyes (2006), "DAEPs have become a convenient center for student removal regardless of discipline, social, academic, or psychological issues" (p. 87).

Following the path of the Fourteenth Amendment, due process must be followed when students are assigned to a DAEP. When students commit infractions against the districts' code of conduct and are removed from class, the administrator or the individual designated by the administrator is required to notify the student in advance of the charges. In addition, the administrator or the individual designated by the administrator is required to plan a hearing and include the student and guardian, during which the student is given the opportunity to present evidence, question witnesses, and be represented by counsel, before punishment is decided (Follenweider, 2011). If the administrator makes the decision to move forward with the referral to the DAEP, the length of the assignment must be in accordance with board policy. According to the Texas Education Agency (2007), "placement at a DAEP may not exceed one year unless, after review, the district determines the student is a threat to the safety of other students or district employees or that extended placement is in the best interest of the student" (p. 3). If the parent disagrees with the assignment to the DAEP, the appeal process must be followed.

Mandatory Referral/Placement

Mandatory referrals are assigned for unlawful infractions that mandate a student be removed from the regular school campus. As specified by TEC Chapter 37, Section 37.006, student removal to a DAEP is mandatory for:

- activating an alarm under false pretenses,
- engaging in unlawful conduct on a school campus or in the immediate vicinity surrounding the campus,
- participating in activities that can be punished as felonies,
- assaulting someone,
- having a weapon,
- having or distributing an illegal substance or drugs,
- having or distributing an alcoholic beverage,
- public lewdness,
- abuse of volatile chemical,
- knowledgeably making a report under false pretenses,
- making a terroristic threat, and
- retaliating against anyone employed by the school (TEA, 2010; Reyes, 2006, 85).

Students also receive mandatory referrals to the DAEP for circumstances that occur away from school such as when the student is given a postponed hearing for a felonious behavior, a student is found guilty by the court for committing a felony, or the superintendent is of the rational belief that a student purposely killed someone (TEC 37.006). Mandatory removals are those that are outlined in the Gun-Free Schools Zones Act (1995).

All students over the age of 6 who do not fall under the special education umbrella, irrespective of gender or ethnicity, are disciplined according to Chapter 37 of the Texas Education Code. According to the law, students who are not age 6 or older may not receive a mandatory referral to the DAEP for any infraction, except for bringing a gun to school. The admission, review, and dismissal committee has to meet to determine if special education students can be sent to the DAEP (Trujillo-Jenks & Starrett, 2015). Students are banned from being on the regular school campuses in the district and from going to school events during the time they are enrolled at the DAEP (TEA, 2007). Only a small number of students have received mandatory referrals to the DAEP since the program began (Cortez & Cortez, 2009).

Discretionary Referral/Placement

A discretionary referral is assigned for offenses that are not specifically listed in Chapter 37 and signifies an infraction prohibited by the districts' code of conduct. The decision to send a student to the DAEP is solely left up to school administrators. According to the TEC, discretionary placement into a DAEP may be made for the following:

- Permanent exclusion from class (TEC 37.003 has been invoked);
- Infractions against the code of conduct;
- Illegal activities;
- Emergency placement/expulsion;
- Possessing, purchasing, using or accepting tobacco products;

- School-related gang violence;
- Fighting/mutual combat;
- Truancy;
- Participating in lethal behaviors, and
- Using, exhibiting, or possessing a knife with a blade that is 5.5 inches long or less (TEA, 2007).

These guidelines give school districts unlimited discretion to decide which offenses can be considered a disciplinary infraction. According to Marc Levin (2006), "a student who talks out of turn, or runs down the hallways even once could be referred to a DAEP." Moreover, a "reasonable belief that a student committed an infraction is all that is necessary under Education Code 37.006 to refer a student to a DAEP" (Levin, p. 10).

Research has confirmed that discretionary placements, as a result of violating the student code of conduct, make up the largest portion of DAEP referrals and this trend has been consistent since the inception of the program (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Losen & Skiba, 2010; Reyes, 2006). According to Reyes (2006), less than 20% of student placements at the DAEP were for mandatory referrals in 2004. A Texas Education Agency report indicated that nearly 66% of the students removed to a DAEP the following school year were referred due to discretionary offenses (TEA, 2007). Booker and Mitchell (2011) conducted a study using a diverse ethnic population of secondary students to examine the likelihood of (a) being sent to a DAEP on a mandatory referral versus a discretionary referral and (b) being sent back within the same school

year. The authors found that the likelihood of being sent to the DAEP on a discretionary referral more than once in the same year was significantly higher for minority students (Booker & Mitchell, 2011).

DAEP Student Population

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs are made up of diverse ethnic student populations. For example, Foley and Pang (2006) conducted a survey with eighty-four alternative school administrators and determined that alternative school programs are attended by students of many different ethnicities. On average, about 100,000 students have received mandatory or discretionary assignments to the DAEP since 1996. For instance, 138,701 DAEP assignments were reported to TEA in 2003-2004 (Cortez & Cortez, 2009). Similarly, an annual TEA report conferred 119,109 DAEP assignments for the 2008-2009 school year (TEA, 2010).

Although DAEP student populations are diverse, the repartition of the different ethnic groups is unequal. Research reveals that minority schoolchildren are excessively represented in DAEPs. In 1975, the CDF conducted a national study of school discipline and discovered that African American pupils experienced suspension significantly more often than other ethnic populations (Gregory et al., 2010). More than 35 years later, Losen and Gillespie (2012) found similar disproportionality in the rate in which African American students were suspended. In an analysis of national disciplinary statistics released by the Office of Civil Rights (OCR), the authors reported African American children to be suspended two times more than Latino children, three times more than

White children, and 8 times more than Asian American children (Losen & Gillespie, 2012).

Fabelo et al. (2011) reported "African American students (particularly African American males) were especially likely to be involved in the school disciplinary system" (p. 45). The authors also reported that more than likely, this increased possibility to be involved was mainly due to school administrators having the discretion to decide if an infraction will be assigned a disciplinary consequence. The authors also reported that while the total student population included only 14% African Americans, 75% of the African American students received suspensions as a disciplinary consequence. In addition, Fabelo et al. reported that more than 80% of boys who were African American 70% of girls who were African American received a discretionary referral for DAEP placement.

Losen and Skiba (2010) stated that Black female and male students have been removed from school for problems with misconduct more than the other cultural groups since 1991. In addition, Losen (2013) examined national data on middle school suspensions and found that in 2006, the rate at which black students were being suspended had doubled since 1972, whereas suspensions for white students had not increased nearly as much. The author reported "approximately one out of every seven Black students enrolled was suspended at least once compared to about one out of every 20 White students" (p. 389). More specifically, 18% more of Black males received suspensions than White males and 14% more of Black females received suspensions than White females (Losen, 2013).

Largely mirroring national trends, substantial disparities in exclusionary discipline rates for minorities in the state of Texas have been found. State data indicate that discretionary removal for minority students constitutes approximately 64% of all DAEP placements, or 74,000 students (Texas Appleseed, 2007). A closer examination reveals the student population was comprised of 48% Hispanics, 25.8% African Americans, and 25.2% Caucasians in 2005 (TEA, 2007). When compared with the representative population, these data are indicative of a disturbing trend, as for example, state level data reveal that only 45 percent of all students in Texas public schools are Hispanic, but Hispanics comprise 47% of all DAEP referrals (Texas Appleseed, 2007). Similarly, African Americans represent less than fifteen percent of the total student population in Texas public schools but as much as 28% of all DAEP referrals (Texas Appleseed, 2007).

Booker and Mitchell (2011) completed an examination of DAEPs and stated that "minority students were significantly more likely than Caucasian students to be placed in disciplinary alternative education" (p. 193). More specifically, the authors reported that Hispanic students were assigned to a DAEP due to discretionary referrals 12 times more, and African Americans were assigned 2.39 times more than Caucasian students. In another study, Fabelo et al. (2011) found that taking into account additional individual and student factors, the chances of an African American student in Texas receiving a discretionary removal in the 9th grade were about 30% higher than for a White or Latino student. Bradshaw, Mitchell, O'Brennan, and Leaf (2010) also found that after controlling for the level of students' behaviors according to teacher perspectives, the

likelihood of receiving a referral for discipline infractions was considerably greater for Black students than Caucasian students.

Cortez and Cortez (2009) examined Texas data and found that of the students placed in a DAEP for receiving a discretionary or mandatory referral, twenty five percent were African American and fifty percent were Hispanic. Cortez and Cortez also found that students in Texas spend, on average, about 365 school days in settings other than their regular classrooms as a result of discretionary referrals. This equates to just under 20% of the school year. Furthermore, some students are removed to the DAEP more than once during a school year (Cortez & Cortez, 2009). In short, such statistics highlight the fact that minorities are often over-represented in discretionary removals and DAEP placements in Texas, both of which ultimately lead to other types of disciplinary placements, such as expulsions, suspensions, and in-school-suspensions (Texas Appleseed, 2007).

Special education students have also been found to be overrepresented in disciplined populations (Cortez & Montecel, 1999; Cortez & Cortez, 2009; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Justice Center, 2011; Sander, 2010). Cortez and Montecel (1999) found that when DAEPs first appeared, suspension rates for students that fall under the special education umbrella tripled the rate at which they were enrolled across the state. Losen and Gillespie (2012) examined national data and reported that disabled students received discretionary referrals two times more than their non-disabled peers.

Similarly, Christle, Nelson, and Jolivette (2004) concluded that in comparison to typically developing students, emotionally or behaviorally disturbed students were

significantly more likely of being subjected to suspension. Kochhar-Bryant and Lacey (2005) reported on data from a NCES study. According to the authors, the data revealed 12% of the alternative education population was comprised of students with an IEP receiving services in special education (Kochhar-Bryant & Lacey, 2005). According to Krezmien, Leone, and Achilles (2006), African American students who attend special education classes are two times more likely of being suspended than special education students who are not African American and even more likely of being expelled than non-special education students. In addition, Porowski, O'Conner, and Passa (2014) reported that data from a summary of national surveys and studies revealed only 11% of all the students had disabilities, but 20% of the total suspensions were given to students with disabilities.

Losen and Gillespie (2012) reported that within the 10 districts across the nation that issue the most suspensions, Black males who had a disability were suspended more than any other student group when school ended in 2010, and Black females with disabilities were suspended more than all other females during the same period. For example, in one public school district, over 90 percent of Black males who had a disability experienced a minimum of one suspension during the 2009-2010 school year, whereas less than 50 percent of Latino males, White males, and Asian Pacific Islander American males were suspended (Losen Gillespie, 2012). Over 50 percent of Black females with disabilities were suspended during this same time, whereas less than 30 percent of Latina females and less that 20 percent of White girls were suspended (p. 35).

Texas data also demonstrate that the special education population is disproportionately impacted by discretionary removal. In 2007-2008, students who are considered to be special education represented one tenth of all the students in Texas, but state disciplinary data reveal that special education students comprised 21% of all discretionary removals resulting in expulsions (TEA, 2010). In recent years, 710 of Texas's roughly 1,030 school districts have disproportionately cited their special education students in discretionary removal (Texas Appleseed, 2007). Disturbingly, data indicate that within special education, African American students are disproportionately excluded from the regular schools and removed to alternative placements (Cole & Heilig, 2011).

Fabelo et al. (2011) reported that approximately three-fourths of the students who were eligible for special education classes in Texas during the time of their study had received a minimum of one discretionary referral in junior high or high school. Out of the 928,940 students followed in the study, 122,250 (13.2 %) were classified as special education. The students were labeled as learning disability (70.8%), emotional disturbance (9.9%), and 1.6% were labeled as autistic, mentally retarded, having injury to the brain, or developmental problems. The remaining students had other impairments which qualified them for special education services (Fabelo et al., 2011). Fabelo et al. also found that 76% of the students with a learning disability was suspended as a result of a disciplinary infraction. In addition, 10% of the students with emotional disturbance experienced being suspended. "Students receiving special education services for learning

disabilities and emotional disturbances were disciplined more than students with no disability" (Fabelo et al., 2011, p. 50).

Purpose of DAEPs

Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs were established to help individuals who are unsuccessful in mainstream schools (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). According to Carver et al. (2010), these schools can be operated in a different building, a separate classroom, or a school can be located inside another school. These alternative schools are intended for individuals who are considered dangerous, violent, disruptive, or who exhibit challenging behaviors (Carver et al., 2010; Flower, McDaniel, & Jolivette, 2011; Simonsen, Britton, & Young, 2010). Since dropping out of school, attending a private school or charter school, or being home schooled are the only alternatives to not attending a disciplinary setting, when assigned, these disciplinary settings are a student's final opportunity to continue with public education within their school district (TEA, 2007). However, many educators think of settings such as DAEPs as a holding tank for students who refuse to follow the rules in a regular school setting (Marbley, Malott, Flaherty, & Frederick, 2011).

Disciplinary alternative schools were created to be a consequential alternative placement to being removed from school for students who have exhibited inappropriate behavior or who have chronic behavioral problems (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Flower, McDaniel, and Jolivette (2011) posited, "For many of the students that enter DAEPs, these institutions are thought to be a 'last chance' educational experience" (p. 490). These learning experiences consist of strategies intended to communicate and demonstrate

acceptable behaviors so that students will live better lives (Flower et al., 2011). According to the Texas Education Agency (2007), DAEPs provide a temporary setting for students with behavior issues. Depending on the reason and the policies of the school district, students may spend anywhere from five days to the length of a school year in a DAEP. The objective is for students to achieve succes once they go back to their regular schools. In addition, students continue to receive academic instruction (which they would not receive if they were suspended or expelled).

Effectiveness of DAEP Referrals/Suspensions

A number of researchers have conducted studies to determine if suspensions are effective (Brown, 2007; Dupper, Theriot, & Craun, 2009; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). The literature indicated numerous explanations for why children are suspended and expelled, which include violating behavioral expectations, preventing delinquency, and maintaining a structured and safe school environment (Brown, 2007; Ramos, 2010). Yet data that have accumulated have consistently indicated that suspending students has not aided in improving student behavior or making schools safer (Skiba, 2014). The American Psychological Association (2008) formed a committee to evaluate the research related to zero tolerance guidelines and applications employed school districts, and discovered that a vast amount of evidence exists to indicate that the guidelines are not beneficial to schools or students. At the conclusion of a thorough review of research and documentation for a year, the Task Force determined that:

> An examination of the evidence shows that zero tolerance policies as implemented have failed to achieve the goals of an effective system of school

> discipline… Zero tolerance has not been shown to improve school climate or school safety. Its application in suspension and expulsion has not proven an effective means of improving student behavior. It has not resolved, and indeed may have exacerbated, minority over-representation in school punishments. Zero tolerance policies as applied appear to run counter to our best knowledge of child development. By changing the relationship of education and juvenile justice, zero tolerance may shift the locus of discipline from relatively inexpensive actions in the school setting to the highly costly processes of arrest and incarceration. In so doing, zero tolerance policies have created unintended consequences for students, families, and communities. (American Psychological Association, 2008, p. 860)

Even though suspensions have been found to be ineffective, the number of overall suspensions has increased, suggesting that suspensions are not dissuading disobedience (Kim et al., 2010; Losen & Skiba, 2010). Brown (2007) stated that suspended students she interviewed reported being suspended multiple times. This implies that one suspension is a precursor to experiencing suspensions in the future (Skiba, 2014; Sundius & Farneth, 2008). Skiba (2014) reported that the chances of receiving a referral to the office or suspended in middle school is extremely high for individuals who received a suspension one or more times during their elementary years, which is an indication that some students may view suspension as a reward instead of a punishment.

As it relates to keeping schools safe, it is within ration to consider that if a child appears to be a threat to another student in the school, taking that child out of the school would offer an immediate solution to making the environment safe. However, if taking a

child out of the school does not contribute to helping address the infractions that initially caused a problem, and being suspended once is a precursor for being suspended multiple times, it consequently does not, with any guarantee, contribute to making schools safer. Suspensions, the most often utilized disciplinary technique, are not conducive to positive outcomes for any students, but rather they remove students from regular classrooms, which increases the possibility that they become delinquent (Krezmien et al., 2010).

Factors Associated with DAEP Referrals/Suspensions

The majority of DAEP placements reported, both nationally and in Texas, are for nonviolent code of conduct violations (Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Justice Center, 2011). From 2000 to 2009, only a small number of all the disciplinary referrals in Texas were for serious mandatory infractions; the rest were for discretionary, relatively minor code of conduct breaches (Justice Center, 2011). Accordingly, in the vast majority of instances in which a student faces a disciplinary consequence, a teacher or administrator has a choice whether to remove the student. Research shows an excessive amount of discrepancy in how such disciplinary choices are made, as schools and districts issue suspensions and expulsions at various rates (Justice Center, 2011; Skiba, Trachok, Chung, Baker, & Hughes, 2012). In this section, literature is reviewed on teacher and school factors that may contribute to the observed repetition in disciplinary removals from the mainstream classroom.

Teacher Factors

Many researchers proposed that a cultural disconnect amid teachers and students may exacerbate the problem of disproportionality (Bacon, Banks, Young & Jackson,

2007; DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2011; Monroe, 2006). Monroe (2006) argued that when a teacher's cultural background is divergent from her or his students, the risk of behavioral misperceptions and inappropriate disciplinary responses increases. For example, a teacher may misperceive a student behavior as disrespectful or disruptive, when in fact the behavior is more a reflection of differences in cultural conventions related to physical and verbal expression than an act of defiance. Likewise, Gregory et al. (2016) examined the results from an earlier study and suggested that cultural discontinuity between teacher and students may have contributed to the finding that White students in the study's sample had a much greater likelihood than African American students to receive disciplinary referrals for objective infractions such as vandalism or offensive language. Conversely, African American students had a greater likelihood to receive referrals for more subjective infractions like disrespectful conduct, threats, or excessive noise. While Monroe (2006) and Gregory et al. (2016) make a case that cultural biases matter in the disciplining process, they do not imply that a cultural mismatch between teacher and students is insurmountable. Rather, their findings highlight the need for targeted teacher training that challenges cultural biases and supports equitable disciplinary strategies.

The need for teacher training reform is further emphasized in research that studies the impact of pre-service experiences on the ways in which teacher's discipline (Kaya, Lundeen & Wolfgang, 2010; Toshalis, 2010). Kaya, Lundeen, and Wolfgang (2010) studied new teachers' disciplinary orientations in advance of their student teaching experiences and after. The authors found that post student teaching, pre-service teachers

were significantly more likely to show a preference for more punitive disciplinary models than before their in-classroom experience. Similarly, Toshalis's (2010) study on pre-service teachers revealed that in a desperate effort to maintain control of their classrooms, pre-service teachers would often revert to and reproduce their own experiences of being disciplined rather than the techniques they may have studied in training programs. Both the observed shift in disciplinary preferences from supportive to punitive models and the reversion to and reproduction of personal disciplinary experiences represent a point of breakdown in collaboration between the university and the school; in the absence of supports necessary to help pre-service teachers successfully apply concepts learned while in training, they opted for quick control, survival methods of discipline.

School Factors

Research indicates that school level factors are essential in predicting the level of application of suspensions in schools as well as overall disproportionality. As Skiba, Trachok, Chung, Baker, and Hughes (2012) asserted, "systemic school level variables are far more important in determining the over representation of African American students in discipline than are any behavioral or student characteristics" (p. 20). While the school level indicators of interest vary across the research literature, a promising potentiality throughout this type of research is that the identification of school level factors related to the disproportionate application of exclusion is particularly useful in developing meaningful and targeted policy solutions.

Certain inquiry in this area puts emphasis on the strength of school level demographics in predicting risk and rates of suspension and expulsion (Christle, Nelson,

& Jolivette, 2004; Han & Akiba, 2011; Skiba et al. 2012). Skiba et al. (2012), for example, determined that school level enrollment of African American students was an even stronger predictor of OSS and expulsion than a student's actual offense. In an analysis of data from a 2005-2006 survey, Han and Akiba (2011) also reported an association between minority enrollment and risk of OSS. In addition, Han and Akiba found an increased frequency of severe exclusionary actions for less serious disciplinary offenses in schools with larger enrollments of minority, special education, and low SES students.

School typology has also been considered when studying the use of exclusion as a disciplinary consequence. School typology includes school level demographics, but also incorporates population, wealth of the community, geographic locality, and the size of the school (Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010b). Noltemeyer and Mcloughlin (2010b) conducted a study based on school typology to examine differences in disciplinary usage and disciplinary disproportionality. The authors determined that school typology was significantly associated with race. In other words, the association between race and utilizing exclusion as a disciplinary consequence was contingent upon a schools' typology.

Other research focuses on the structure, clarity, and enforcement of school rules and consequences. A study by Gregory and Cornell (2009), made a case based on parenting literature that adolescents are at a stage in their lives, both cognitively and developmentally, in which they are much better equipped to process and respond to authoritative rather than authoritarian leadership. Authoritative leadership is marked by

structure and support (I expect you to do x, and this is why). Authoritarian leadership, on the other hand, is denoted by rigid structure and a lack of support (do x, because I said so). In a follow-up study based on this premise, Gregory, Cornell, and Fan (2011) analyzed student school climate surveys to measure schools' levels of authoritative characteristics. They then explored the association between schools' authoritative ratings and suspension rates. The study's findings showed that schools with low authoritative ratings on both structure and support indicators had increased levels of suspension for all students, as well as the most pronounced disciplinary disproportionality by race.

Yet another school level factor investigated in the research is school setting (i.e., K-8 verses middle school). Arcia (2007) studied suspension data for sixth and seventh graders from K-8 school settings and junior high settings in an attempt to determine how school setting is associated with suspension. Arcia identified a significant association; sixth and seventh graders in junior high settings were suspended significantly more than those in K-8 school settings, irrespective of cultural background, academic level, and discipline record. Even though the study identified a strong association between setting and suspension, the design of the study prohibited Arcia (2007) from detecting factors in the junior high setting that may have been the cause for students to be suspended at such high rates.

Outcomes Associated with DAEP Referrals/Suspensions

Schools use suspensions to DAEPs as a means to remove students who are labeled difficult to teach or who exhibit disruptive behaviors from the mainstream classroom. While suspension is utilized more than any other disciplinary consequence for

inappropriate behaviors, several studies have found that suspensions negatively impact student outcomes and the learning environment (Allen & White-Smith, 2014; Brown, 2007; Kim et al., 2010; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Noltemeyer & Mcloughlin, 2010a; Skiba, 2010; Skiba, Arredondo, & Williams, 2014; Sugai & Horner, 2008; Sundius & Farneth, 2008). Sugai and Horner (2008) conveyed that students who had experienced suspension exhibited an increase in unacceptable social behaviors. Students feel angry and isolated from school as a result of exclusionary discipline (Hemphill, Heerde, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, & Catalano, 2012; Sundius & Farneth, 2008).

The interruption of time spent learning is apparently one of the negative results of suspension (Gregory et al., 2010) that results in lower academic achievement. Kralevich, Slate, Tejada-Delgado, and Kelsey (2010) used a sample of middle school adolescents in Texas to determine whether students who experienced exclusionary discipline scored lower on reading and math state assessments than those who never experienced exclusionary discipline. The results showed that students who were excluded from school scored considerably lower in reading and math throughout middle school than students in the same grades who had not experienced exclusion from school (Kralevich et al., 2010). The results also showed that sixth graders who experienced exclusion as a disciplinary consequence had better scores on both assessments than sixth graders who did not experience exclusion however, seventh and eighth graders who experienced exclusionary discipline scored lower in reading and math than students in the same grades that did not experience exclusion (Kralevich et al., 2010). Similarly, sixth graders who received DAEP placement outscored their counterparts in reading and math, but students in

seventh and eighth grade who received a DAEP assignment did not score as well in math and reading as their counterparts (Kralevich et al., 2010).

Arcia (2006) also found that suspension negatively affected students' academic achievement. She conducted a longitudinal analysis that compared two groups of students based on suspension history. One group had received at least one suspension while the other group had not received any suspensions. During year one, the students with suspensions were reported three grade levels behind the non-suspended students. In year two, the students differed substantially. During this year, the suspended students were now five grade levels behind the non-suspended students (Arcia, 2006; Gregory et al., 2010). These results highlight the compounding effects of suspensions on students' academic futures (Watson, 2014).

Researchers have shown a clear connection between suspensions and dropping out of school (Cole & Heilig, 2011; Jordan & Anil, 2009; Losen & Gillespie, 2012; Skiba, 2010; Sparks, Johnson, & Akos, 2010). Sparks et al. (2010) discovered three factors that were significantly associated with student dropout. The authors linked failing a grade, failing a final exam, and being suspended for longer than a few days with being more likely to drop out (Sparks et al., 2010). Specifically, Sparks and colleagues found that over 35% of students who dropped out in 9th grade had been suspended for longer than ten days that year or during the previous school year, in comparison to three percent who stayed in school; nearly 75% of the students who received long-term suspensions that dropped out had been suspended for a short term as well.

Mac Iver, Balfanz, and Byrnes (2009) conducted research over the four year period 2003-04 to 2006-07 on five districts in the Denver Public Schools with an elevated dropout rate. The authors reported that drop outs had experienced one to three suspensions within those four years. Furthermore, analysis of the 2006-2007 dropouts showed that ten percent experienced at least one suspension during the previous two years, in comparison to 6% of graduates.

Using records acquired from the Kentucky Department of Education, Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) conducted a study of Kentucky high schools to determine how school factors and disciplinary consequences were related to dropping out of school. The authors concluded that dropping out was prevalent in schools where suspension was heavily utilized, the majority of students were underprivileged, and a high percentage of students were retained.

Lee, Cornell, Gregory, and Fan (2011) found similar results when they examined the relationship between being suspended and dropping. Utilizing 289 high schools in the Virginia public school system, the study examined the relationship between being suspended and dropping out for African American and Caucasian students. Results revealed that dropout rates were low in schools where the number of suspensions was low, similar for African Americans and Caucasians (Lee et al., 2011). "Schools that suspended approximately 22% of their students over the course of the school year had a dropout rate (3.52) that was 56% greater than the dropout rate (2.26) for schools that suspended only 9% of their students" (p. 184).

Tobin and Sugai (1999) found that being suspended only one time in 6th grade was closely correlated with a students' decision to drop out of high school. Additional accounts showed that the likelihood of dropping out by 10th grade was much greater for students who had experienced suspension than those who had not experienced suspension (Lieberman, 2008). While reviewing information concerning zero tolerance guidelines, the American Psychological Association (2008) found that even though the belief is that certain disciplinary methods supported by zero tolerance guidelines such as suspension/removal to DAEPs will positively influence students and generate acceptable conduct in school, in reality the guidelines are linked to increased future classroom disruption and correlated with being more likely to drop out or failing to meet the requirements for graduation on time. The National Center for Education Statistics conveyed that 17% of students assigned to an alternative school operated by the school district dropped out of school (Chiang, 2012). Losen and Martinez (2013) also mentioned the relationship between being suspended and school dropout:

> Given the recent research showing that being suspended even once in ninth grade is associated with a twofold increase in the likelihood of dropping out, from 16% for those not suspended to 32% for those suspended just once, the high number of students suspended, should be of grave concern to all parents, educators, taxpayers, and policymakers. (p. 1)

Students who drop out of school cause grave complications for themselves, the education system, and the community, as well as for the general public. Siegrist et al. (2010) stated "The era in which a high school dropout could earn a living wage no longer

exists in the United States. Not only do dropouts themselves suffer, but they add staggering financial and social costs to their communities, states, and country" (p. 133). Christle et al. (2007) reported that individuals who drop out do not earn nearly as much as individuals who graduate from high school. However, Jordan and Anil (2009) stated that the majority of dropouts are more than likely to be jobless, have a greater chance to go to prison or receive government assistance, and they live shorter lives.

Discipline procedures that include exclusionary practices may also result in additional negative outcomes for students. When students experience suspension, the may become less attached to school, less concerned about completing classwork and following the rules, and consequently less inspired to succeed. Students who become less attached to school will probably indulge in delinquent behaviors and experience academic failure (Gregory et al., 2010). Perceived teacher support has been the most common theme used to measure school bonding (Libbey, 2004). Studies show that when students sense a feeling of support from, and attachment to the teachers at school, they are more likely to display acceptable behaviors (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2011; Freidenfelt Liljebert, Eklund, Vafors Fritz, & af Klinteberg, 2011). Freidenfelt Liljeberg et al. (2011) revealed in their longitudinal study that being attached to the teacher was the main influence that inhibited student delinquency. Similarly, Demanet and Van Houtte (2011) found that students who felt their teachers supported them tended to abide by school rules, and that feeling of being supported could offset the effects of deviant peers. The researchers determined that in order to put a halt to student misbehavior, teachers must make every effort to make their students feel supported at school (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2011).

Students often times feel they are being treated unfairly when they are suspended (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). When students perceive their suspension to be unwarranted, they may increase the behavior that they were initially punished for (Brown, 2007). They begin to feel like their teachers are picking on them. Typically, students who experience suspension develop negative feelings toward the school and school staff, which results in students not having good relationships with their teachers when they come back to school (Brown, 2007). Sekai reported that students in a DAEP were bitter and angry about when they were removed from their regular environment. Furthermore, researchers have reported that exclusion causes students to feel a sense of rejection from the school (Brown, 2007; Skiba, Eaton, & Sotoo, 2004). Mac Iver (2011) identified studies that show a connection between whether a student chooses to stay in school or drop out and the level of acceptance they feel from the school and school staff. Further, Mac Iver pointed out that when students feel like they belong to school they tend to interact more positively with other students, classwork, the staff, and the school as a whole. They generally have a tendency to become more involved in school activities.

Conversely, feeling alienated from or rejected by the school is connected with misconduct, decreased desire to go to school, bad grades, and school dropout. Behaviors such as these are not conducive to strengthening the relationships students have with their schools or teachers when they need it the most. Brown (2007) found that being excluded from school caused students to not trust teachers and staff to implement discipline procedures fairly and consistently and created the perception for students that teachers

didn't care about them. Students who were suspended a lot felt like the relationships with their teachers needed to improve.

Students who are attached to school and feel like they fit in are not as likely to drop out. Students do not make the decision to leave school impulsively. It results after a long process of unproductive experiences in school that can cause students to feel detached. Christle et al. (2007) reported a range of factors that may influence students to decide to drop out, including academic failure, grade retention, and engagement perception. Chiang (2012) revealed that that the most prevalent factor related to school dropout is engagement behaviors; this influence is bigger than the impact of failure in school. This assumption backs the belief that a student who senses a connection with school will more than likely decide not to drop out. In accordance with these findings, Christle et al. determined that suspensions are negatively related to school dropout. When students experience exclusion from traditional classrooms, their chances to improve academically and socially decline drastically. Suspension merely sets students up to fail; the decision to drop out is only one critical outcome.

Research has shown that school exclusion is not an actual deterrent for misbehavior and it is a precursor for problem behaviors in the future (Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Sundius & Farneth, 2008; Tobin et al., 1996). In a 2006 study, Skiba and Rausch conveyed that over 40% of the total number of students who received a suspension was suspended more than one time. Additional studies have demonstrated differences concerning adolescents who continue to get into trouble. For instance, Morrison, Anthony, Storino and Dillon (2001) reported that "51.2% of suspended students had

records of previous office referrals for disciplinary problems and 27.4% had experienced previous suspensions" (p. 282). In addition, some students had experienced both of the disciplinary consequences. Hemphill, Toumbourou, Herrenkohl, McMorris, and Catalano (2006) found suspension to be associated with the heightened possibility of becoming disruptive one year after being suspended. Brown (2007) conducted a study about suspension and found that many of the students who experienced suspension were suspended on more than one occasion, indicating that a previous suspension can predict a suspension in the future. Reviewing previous research, the author ascertained that 40% of the suspended students had been suspended more than one time; many of the students had received suspensions so frequently they did not remember the exact number of times. Brown ascribed recidivism to "the fact that school exclusion, in and of itself, offers no help in addressing the behaviors that got them into trouble" (p. 435).

The use of exclusionary and punitive discipline, like DAEPs, also appears to be associated with increased rates of delinquency and incarceration (Geronimo, 2010). Research has begun to establish evidence that proves exclusion from the mainstream school environment is a precursor to students being introduced to the criminal and juvenile justice system (Carmichael, Whitten, & Voloudakis, 2005; Cole & Heilig, 2011; Chiang, 2012; Christle et al., 2005; Justice Center, 2011; Ruglis & Freudenberg, 2010; Texas Appleseed Organization, 2007; 2010). According to Meiners (2015), out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to alternative schools push students out of school and closer to a future in the juvenile and criminal justice systems. Carmichael et al. found that disciplinary referrals in school were a strong predictor of future association

with the justice system. Similarly, the Justice Center (2011) found a greater possibility for students with repeated suspensions and expulsions to become involved in activities that result in a juvenile criminal record. Even more disturbing, the study revealed that even a single discretionary suspension or expulsion tripled students' chances of being connected to the justice system in the subsequent year (p. 24). Furthermore, the Texas Appleseed Organization (2007) reports:

> Involvement in the criminal justice system can be viewed as a continuum of entry points – from early school-based behavior problems that result in suspensions, expulsions, or Disciplinary Alternative Education Program (DAEP) placement to more serious law breaking and probation violations that can involve the juvenile justice system and, ultimately, the adult penal system. (p. 1)

Fabelo et al. (2011) conducted a longitudinal study over 10 years of 928,940 students in Texas. They studied discipline records for all seventh graders for three consecutive school years starting in 2000. The authors combined this data with data from the juvenile department in order to determine who was associated with the juvenile justice system. Results revealed that the majority of students registered in public school, over 85%, were also registered in the juvenile probation system. The researchers examined the data for a six year period and determined that more than half of the middle and high school students in the study had been suspended or expelled (Fabelo et al., 2011).

Literature Related to the Method

Qualitative studies are conducted when research is essential to examining a problem or issue in place of depending on information provided in previously published works or from other research studies (Bashir, Afzal, & Azeem, 2008; Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is also conducted when the researcher is in search of a comprehensive gain of knowledge or understanding about an issue. The only way to reach this understanding is for the researcher to speak directly to participants to allow them to share their stories. Barratt, Choi, and Lee (2011) described the methodology as a realistic style used to comprehend a phenomenon in true-to-life settings in which the investigator attempted to unveil the truth about the phenomenon being studied without manipulating it.

This study was designed as a case study. Case study is a process researchers use to analyze one case or multiple cases in order to gain an understanding about a larger number of cases (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Baxter and Jack (2008) conveyed that selecting "cases" is a vital facet of conducting a case study. Baxter and Jack quoted Miles and Huberman (1994) to refer to a "case" as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded text; in effect, your unit of analysis" (p. 545). The qualitative case study method was applicable to this study as the research question driving this study allowed the researcher to examine the perspectives of teachers who work together (the bounded case) about why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP. This is an issue that needs to be explored. This study explored the issue of repeated referrals to DAEPs as an

alternative to depending on the information provided in previously published works or data from other studies.

One-on-one conversational interviews will allow the researcher to speak directly to teachers to gain a detailed understanding of their perspectives. According to Bashir et al. (2013), data should be collected in a natural and comfortable setting. This methodology was chosen for this study because the method allows data to be collected in a natural and comfortable setting, which was at the location of each participant's choice.

Literature Relating to Differing Methods

Phenomenology "aims to focus on people's perceptions of the world in which they live in and what it means to them; a focus on people's lived experience of a concept or phenomenon" (Langdridge, 2007, p.4). According to DeCastro (2011), in phenomenological studies the participants are those whose life experiences are being studied. Since the participants in this study were not the individuals who are repeatedly being sent to alternative schools, a phenomenological design was not the best choice for this study.

Ethnography is a research process of gaining knowledge about people's social experiences in the context of their everyday lives (Christensen, Mikkelsen, Nielsen, & Harder, 2011). The emphasis of ethnography research is an entire cultural group (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013). Cultural characteristics are not relevant to the current study, therefore this approach was not used.

The basic purpose for conducting a grounded theory study is to arrive at a different theory from data collected in the field (Dunne, 2011). Similar to case study

research, data for grounded theory can be collected by a variation of techniques such as interviewing participants, observing participants, or reviewing documentation that may shed light on the focus of the study (Urquhart, Lehmann, & Myers, 2010). Grounded theorists must collect data and analyze data concurrently in order to gather enough information to fully develop a theory (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007). It is during the continuous back and forth relationship between collecting and analyzing data that theory is developed. This approach is known as the constant comparative method (Suddaby, 2006). Because the researcher was not interested in developing a theory or able to spend the amount of time in the field needed for constant comparative analysis, grounded theory was not utilized.

The objective of narrative research is to convey a story (Holt, 2010). A narrative research design could have been employed, but the retelling of the participants' narratives of experiences regarding the one, central phenomenon of interest was not the focus of the research question. The case study technique was most suitable for the current study as it provided the researcher the opportunity to gain a detailed understanding of teacher perspectives of a specific group of teachers who work in the same setting (the bounded case) about a specific phenomenon, through interviews in the natural setting.

Summary

This review of the literature provided information about disciplinary alternative education programs, including the historical perspective, how research defines the programs, the students who are most at risk for attending the schools, how students are referred to the schools, and the state and federal laws associated with alternative schools.

In addition, this chapter summarized the purpose of DAEP referrals/suspensions, the effectiveness of DAEP referrals/suspensions and student outcomes associated with DAEP referrals/suspensions. Lastly, some specific teacher and school factors associated with suspensions were discussed.

Alternative schools were established to help combat the apparent problem in the education arena. The number of alternative schools has greatly increased since federal laws were introduced to require school districts to open facilities for students displaying problem behaviors. Many states have passed legislation regarding the establishment of DAEPs, which includes the guidelines that mandate students to be removed from the regular school campus.

In 1995, school districts in Texas were mandated to establish DAEPs to ensure that students continue to be educated during their suspensions (Texas Education Code (TEC), Sec. 37.008). The legislation outlines the specific requirements that DAEPs must follow, as well as the type of offenses that require students be removed from the regular school to a DAEP. The majority of these offenses are minor and discretionary, which means that administrators are not mandated to suspend students to DAEPs for the offense.

The literature indicated several reasons for suspending children from the regular classroom, such as penalty for disregarding school rules, discouraging misbehavior, and keeping the school organized and safe (Brown, 2007; Taras et al., 2003). For some time, the number of overall suspensions has risen, suggesting that suspensions have not led to safer schools nor have they deterred problem student behaviors. Instead, suspension has

been negatively linked with student outcomes, such as school failure, high dropout rates, future behavioral offenses, and going to jail.

Several school and teacher factors have been identified as the cause of some student misbehaving. It is obvious that one of the present issues facing the educational community is how to ensure that schools are equipped to educate all youth in traditional classes. The current study aims to determine why some students are repeatedly being sent to DAEPs while other students are not. The answer to this problem can be regarded as a place to begin the research in decreasing the number of referrals/suspensions to DAEPs and making regular schools more conducive to student success.

As previously stated, Section 2 reviewed the literature associated with factors contributing to repeated referrals to DAEPs. Section 3 will give details about the research design and the manner in which the study will be completed. Specifically, Section 3 will describe the methodology, context of the study, procedures used to collect and analyze data, ethics concerning participants, role of the researcher, and approaches regarding validity. Section 4 will summarize the study's outcomes.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to use teacher perspectives to reach an understanding about why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP. In this section, I will describe the study's design and the way the study was completed. A qualitative research approach was applied in order to collect and analyze data. Teachers were interviewed and asked for their perspectives about why some students were repeatedly sent to the alternative school. The data were coded in order to find developing themes, as suggested by Creswell (2013).

Research Design

Creswell (2013) stated, "qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 18). While conducting qualitative research, data collection takes place in a setting that is natural to the participants, and inductive data analysis is used with the intention of developing themes (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers display their own self-awareness and self-understanding as they report the results of their study using the voices of their participants, as well as giving a thorough description of the research problem and what can be done to fix or address the problem.

In this study, I used a case study design. Creswell (2013) stated,

> Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through

> detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 38)

A case study is a suitable technique for researchers who intend to examine the context or setting that they consider to be relevant to the phenomenon they are studying (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). The research question fueling this study was appropriate for the case study method as it allowed a detailed understanding to be gained about why some students were being repeatedly sent to alternative schools while other students were not.

The main intent of phenomenology is to study the perceptions of individuals' day-to-day life experiences and what they mean to them; therefore, it was not the best design choice for this study. An ethnographic approach was not used, as I was not interested in an entire cultural group and was not able to devote a prolonged amount of time to gathering information, which is the main feature associated with ethnographic studies. I did not use a grounded theory strategy, as I did not wish to develop a new theory. On the other hand, a narrative approach could have been applied, but I was not interested in retelling the life story of either of the participants. The case study strategy was the most applicable for this study as it provided me the opportunity to acquire knowledge of teacher perspectives about school factors in the natural setting.

Research Question

Research questions are vital to a study. According to Hatch (2002), concrete research questions guide the investigation to the center of the unit to be examined. The research question guiding this study was the following:

1. How do a select group of teachers describe why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP?

Context of the Study

Setting

The participants were drawn from four campuses in a school district in North Central Texas. The district served over 150,000 students. According to the district's 2012-2013 Facts Sheet, the district had a total of 223 schools, including 149 elementary schools and 74 secondary schools. The student ethnic composition of the school district was 69.8% Hispanic American, 23.4% African American, 4.7% Anglo American, less than 2% Asian, less than 1% American Indian, less than 1% National Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 0.5% multiracial, with 89% of all students eligible to receive free lunch. The district employed over 10,000 teachers, and their ethnic distribution showed that 39% were African American, 34.7% were European American, 23.6% were Hispanic American, 0.4% was Native American, and 2.3% were Asian/Pacific Islander. According to TEA (2013), 97.86% of the district's teachers were highly qualified.

Teachers from three of the middle schools that send students to the DAEP, as well as the DAEP, were asked to take part in the study. I invited core content teachers from the middle schools and the DAEP who had taught students with repeat referrals to participate in the study. If the teachers I initially invited decided not to participate or did not have experience with students who had repeated referrals, I invited more teachers until three from each of the three middle schools and five from the DAEP agreed to participate.

The Participants and Sample Size

The participants in this study were core content teachers who had taught students who had been sent to the DAEP more than once during the school year. The teachers were those who worked at three of the middle that sends students to the DAEP, as well as teachers who worked at the DAEP itself. Purposeful sampling as suggested by Patton (2015) was employed in the study. Fourteen teachers were purposefully selected to take part in the study. According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010), "The goal of purposeful sampling is not to obtain a large and representative sample; the goal is to select persons, places or things that can provide the richest and most detailed information to help us answer our research questions" (p. 134). For this study, participants were purposefully selected based on their history with teaching students who had been repeatedly sent to the DAEP. I used public information on the districts website to identify possible participants. Three teachers were selected from each of the three home schools, and five were selected from the DAEP. The five teachers from the DAEP were teachers who had also taught students who had been sent there more than once during the school year.

Prior to any research being done, permission was obtained from the appropriate committee at Walden University. Permission did not have to be attained from the school district because only public information was used, and all interviews took place away from the schools. Once the possible participants had been identified, letters were sent, via e-mail, to the selected teachers specifying the objective of the study and welcoming their participation. Informed consent forms were e-mailed to the teachers as well. I asked the

teachers who planned to participate to give their consent by replying "I consent" to the e-mail. When any of the selected teachers decided not to participate, I repeated the selection process and invited additional teachers to participate in the study.

Ethical Protection of Participants

According to Creswell (2013), "a qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection in the field and in analysis and dissemination of qualitative reports" (p. 37). Before collecting any data, I attained approval from the university. To protect the ethical rights of the research participants, I adhered to several elements from Lipson's (1994) list of ethical issues:

1. Pseudonyms were assigned to teachers in order to keep their information confidential.
2. Pseudonyms were assigned to the district and schools to provide protection against any potential harm and as an additional level of protection of confidentiality.
3. The case study symbolized a complex representation rather than a singular representation.
4. Teachers were told about the purpose and nature of the study and its possible outcomes.
5. Teachers were able to decline to participate in the study, decline from answering any questions they did not wish to answer, and could decide to discontinue participation without prior notice. I informed teachers that there would be no social repercussions for declining to participate.

6. I asked all teachers who decided to take part in the study to consent by replying I consent to the e-mail. The consent form was reviewed with them before the interview began.
7. I asked teachers to refrain from sharing information "off the record" while the study was taking place.
8. I refrained from sharing personal information with the participants during interviews so as to not influence the information shared by participants.

It was imperative to create camaraderie with the study participants. I made sure that the line of communication was comfortable with each of the participants. The participants were contacted individually, via district e-mail, for me to clarify the objective and the process of the study. Each participant was able to choose where his or her interview took place so he or she would feel relaxed enough to speak freely. Each interview took place in private. In addition, I assured the participants that their personal information will remain safe and private. The recorded interviews were locked in a safe at my home. Electronic files will be kept on a laptop with password protection which will also be kept locked in the safe at my home, and I will destroy all data 5 years after the study has been completed.

Role of the Researcher

I was employed in the school district represented in this study and had been for 14 years. Since I passed the teacher certification tests 10 years ago, I had taught middle school math and science at the DAEP in this district, which was also represented in this study. During the time I had worked in this capacity, I had developed professional

relationships throughout the district. I was professionally acquainted with the teachers I interviewed from the alternative school, and it was possible that I may have been professionally acquainted with some of the teachers I interviewed from the three middle schools. I had never had a supervisory role with any of the possible participants. As a researcher, I planned and supervised each phase of the study. First, I developed interview questions and conducted all interviews as described in the data collection section. I was also responsible for analyzing and safely securing all data in a way that access to data was limited only to me. In addition, I will destroy the data in a timely manner after the research has been completed so that confidentiality will not be breached.

I was employed by the district in which this study took place; therefore, I was professionally acquainted with the teachers I interviewed from the DAEP and could have possibly been professionally acquainted with some of the teachers I interviewed from the three middle schools. Due to these pre-established professional relationships, establishing a researcher-participant working relationship with the teachers was an easy task. I attempted to make the participants comfortable with participating in the study by fully explaining why I was conducting the study and how it would be conducted, but also letting them know that there would be no social repercussions for not participating. I also made sure that the participants knew that they could decline to respond to the questions they did not want to respond to and could leave the study at any time. I addressed the participants by their first names to help them feel more comfortable and relaxed during interviews. Lastly, I assured participants that their identities as well as their answers to the interview questions will remain private.

As the researcher, it was important for me to recognize that I may have biases that possibly would impact the outcomes of the study. According to Merriam (2002), it is imperative to recognize biases and monitor how they might be influencing data collection and analysis instead of attempting to ignore the biases. Because I was a teacher at the DAEP in this study, I had feelings about the topic of the study. I believe the home schools label some students as troublemakers, and those students are repeatedly sent to the DAEP for any infraction, including minor ones that other students may not be sent for. I believe that the home school environments need to be more structured. Therefore, during interviews, I refrained from discussing details about my opinions. In addition, I did not allow my beliefs about the schools to distort the results of the study. I attempted to formulate questions to offset my biases, as well as took into account opposing viewpoints when I reviewed the interview transcripts for analysis. Lastly, I asked a professional colleague who was also a former Walden doctoral student to independently code some of the interviews to make sure the themes and categories I developed are logical.

Data Collection

In this study, I used interviews as the main process for collecting data. According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), interviews are structured conversations. One-on-one conversational interviews were conducted with the teachers. The interviews were structured, and the questions were prepared before the time of the interviews. Participants were made aware of the aim of the study, and every effort was made to ensure that the

subjects felt comfortable enough to speak freely as they were interviewed. Participants were also assured that all data collected will remain confidential.

According to Creswell (2013), interviews should take place in a natural and comfortable setting; therefore, the location of each interview was determined through an agreement between the participant and me. It is important for the researcher to have participants who are willing to speak openly and honestly, and interviews should take place in a setting that is comfortable enough to allow them to do so. Interviewees who are hesitant to share information may produce negative data.

All interviews followed the established interview protocol (See Appendix A). I asked each participant for authorization to use an audio recorder to record the interview. I took notes about the interviewee's comments and body language. After each of the interviews had been completed, I transcribed them within 72 hours. The interviews consisted of three types of questions. I used main questions to break down the topic so the interviewee can fully understand it and indulge in a detailed discussion. The main questions (see Appendix A) were prepared prior to the interview. Follow-up questions relate to the responses the interviewee has given. These are supplementary questions asked to explore thoughts and ideas presented by the interviewee and are important for attaining complex facts. Probes encourage the interviewee to continue the discussion about the topic, to add something that may have been omitted, or to clarify what has already been said.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2013) stated:

> data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data (i.e. text data as in transcripts, or image data as in photographs) for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion. (p. 19)

When using the case study method, data analysis entails a thorough explanation of the case—phenomenon occurring in a bounded text (Baxter & Jack, 2008)—and the place where the phenomenon occurs—its setting.

Inductive analyses (Hatch, 2002) were used to analyze interview data. First, the recorded interviews were transcribed within 48-72 hours. Hatch (2002) affirmed that "data from interviews should be processed as soon as possible following the interview" (p. 112). Processing the data so soon after interacting with the participants enables the researcher the opportunity to write up all that he or she can remember from the interview. In addition, having transcribed data will help shape subsequent interviews. Every interview was read carefully before moving on to the next one. I examined the transcripts to identify emerging concepts, themes, and events across the interviews. Next, I examined the interviews to clarify what was meant by the concepts and themes. Then, I began coding, which is to distinctly label the concepts, themes, and events. After physically coding the interviews, I sorted the data into groups according to the labels using a computer program. After sorting, the data were analyzed more thoroughly for the identification of any secondary themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and for evidence of discrepant data. Sufficient discrepant data analysis consists of discovering unreliable occurrences in the phenomenon and relating them to reliable occurrences to gain an

understanding of how complex the phenomenon is (Morrow, 2005). I rigorously examined discrepant data to determine if the themes or categories could be modified to support the data. I also reported how I handled the discrepant data.

Methods to Address Validity

All researchers aim to generate trustworthy information in a moral fashion (Merriam, 2002). Both producers and consumers of research want to be assured that the findings of an investigation are to be believed and trusted (Merriam, 2002, p. 22). As Stake (2000) noted, facts acquired in a study "faces hazardous passage from the writer to the reader. The writer needs a way of safeguarding the trip" (p. 443). In qualitative research, the validation of a study is imperative, and the importance of validation has been highlighted through the plethora of perspectives available in the literature. These perspectives have been accepted by researchers as viable methods or strategies. Creswell and Miller (2000) focused on a number of strategies that are commonly used by researchers conducting qualitative studies. In the current study, several of these strategies were used in order to assure validity within the study.

One of the strategies used in this study was member checking. With this strategy, the researcher asks the participants for their opinions about the accuracy of the findings and how they were interpreted (Creswell, 2013). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). For this validation strategy, I took my preliminary findings back to the participants for feedback. As themes emerged, I asked participants if my interpretation of what they told

me during the initial interview was accurate. I conducted member checks throughout the course of the study.

Another strategy that was used to increase the level of validity in this study was peer review or debriefing. This strategy offers an outside examination of the methods the researcher uses (Merriam, 1988). Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the expression "devil's advocate" to refer to the peer reviewer as the one who helps researchers remain honest by asking questions about procedures, implications, and analyses; and offers researchers a listening ear to talk about their feelings. Two recent doctoral graduate students served as peer reviewers for this study. They were asked to assess the findings and make remarks. The researcher and both peer debriefers wrote notes in a journal about their peer reviewing sessions.

The last strategy utilized in this study was using rich, thick descriptions when documenting the study results. This strategy enables the person who reads the study to come to conclusions about transferability (Morse & McEvoy, 2014). With such detailed description, readers are able to apply findings to additional situations (Creswell, 2012) and to decide if outcomes may be transferred "because they are applicable to other contexts" (Lietz & Zayas, 2010, p. 195). When reporting the results of the study, I reported brief quotes from the participants to enable readers to gauge exactly what the participants said instead of having to take the researchers' word.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to gain an understanding about why some students were repeatedly being sent to the DAEP. The goal of this research was to reveal teacher perceptions about what was causing some students to be sent to the DAEP repeatedly. A case study design was used because it allowed me the opportunity to gather knowledge of teacher perspectives acquired in the natural setting. This section gives a detailed explanation of the data collection procedures and data analysis techniques used in the study. Categories, patterns, and emerging themes are described in an in-depth presentation of the findings. Evidence of quality is also presented in this section.

Research Question

The guiding research question for this study was the following:

1. How do a select group of teachers describe why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP?

Methods Used to Store and Gather Data

I used a qualitative case study design in order to gain an understanding of teacher perspectives about why some students were repeatedly being sent to the DAEP in a school district in North Central Texas. All of the schools in the district send students to one particular DAEP. The participants in this study were core content teachers who worked at three of the middle schools that send students to the DAEP and core content teachers who worked at the DAEP. All of the participants had taught students with repeated referrals to the DAEP.

I began data collection immediately after receiving approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (#12-21-15-0120677). Data collection began in April 2016 and continued through May 31, 2016. During this time, I identified potential participants and invited them to participate in the study. I also conducted interviews with the participants who agreed to participate.

Potential participants were located by accessing the public data on the school districts' website. Each school in the district had a staff directory that listed teacher names, position, and contact information. Participants who met the selection criteria were invited to participate in the study. Three teachers were invited from each of three middle schools, and five teachers were invited from the DAEP. Those participants were e-mailed informed consent forms and asked to respond to the e-mail with I consent if they agreed to participate. The consent form clarified the details of the study, including the purpose, the participants' rights, and my contact information.

Fourteen teachers agreed to participate in the study by replying I consent to the e-mail. Participants were purposefully chosen to participate in the study. This sample size and sampling strategy aligned with the description Lodico et al. (2010) offered: "The goal of purposeful sampling is not to obtain a large and representative sample; the goal is to select persons, places or things that can provide the richest and most detailed information to help us answer our research questions" (p. 138). For this study, participants were purposefully selected due to their experiences in teaching students who had been repeatedly sent to the DAEP.

During the course of the above-mentioned research period, I collected the data. The interviews were structured, and the questions (Appendix A) were prepared before the time of the interviews. All interviews were conducted individually at the location of the participants' choice. Twelve of the interviews were conducted in person, and the other two were held over the telephone at the participants' request. All 14 interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder, and each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. I transcribed each interview within 24-48 hours. I intently listened to the recordings to ascertain the participant's perspective about why some students were repeatedly sent to the DAEP. I documented all communications with the participants in a research log. I generated a reflective journal in order to save the notes I made during each interview. I used my log and journal to help me while sorting the data. The collected data were saved on my password-protected laptop and will be kept locked in a safe in my home until destroyed after 5 years.

Data Analysis

The initial step in the transcription process was to transcribe the data from the interviews into a Microsoft Word document. I verified the accuracy of the interview transcripts by comparing the transcripts to the audio tape. At that point, I e-mailed each transcript to the perspective participant to be checked for accuracy. Corrections to the initial transcripts were infrequent and minor, resulting in the official transcripts for data analysis.

The inductive analysis method promoted by Hatch (2002) was used to identify emerging concepts, themes, and events across the interviews for each of the four schools.

The data were separated into categories based on the interview questions. Codes were established according to commonalities in the responses given by participants for each data set. Each data set was then sorted into groups according to the labels using Microsoft Word. After sorting, I examined the data more thoroughly to identify any secondary themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Once all data were coded and sorted, I listed the themes from each data set in a table and examined them for commonalities. As the data were reviewed and recoded, the initial themes were reduced by combining common themes. Themes that were repeatedly found became the final themes, and themes that did not repeat were omitted. The final themes were chosen because they frequently appeared in each transcription. Those themes were prevalent in all or nearly all of the participants' responses. For the most part, participants mentioned these themes in response to more than one interview question. The final themes that were developed from the data analysis were separated into two categories: school factors and teacher factors.

The intent of this study was to gain an understanding of teacher perspectives about why some students were repeatedly sent to alternative schools. Included in the following themes are responses from teachers from three different middle schools that sent students to the DAEP, as well as responses from teachers at the alternative school. The teacher responses are not separated by school for purposes of this section, in part to protect the identity of the participants. For each category, the discussion starts with the most popular theme and ends with the least popular theme. Teachers were assigned a number and are referred to as Participant Number 1 through Participant Number 14 to establish confidentiality.

Findings

This study was guided by one central research question: How do a select group of teachers describe why some students are repeatedly sent to the DAEP? Teachers were asked 14 structured interview questions in order to determine their perspectives about why some students are being repeatedly sent to the DAEP, while other students were not. The data were separated into two categories: school factors and teacher factors. The emergent themes for each category are discussed in detail below.

School Factors

In this study, the participants expressed their opinions about what school factors contributed to students returning to the DAEP. The participants described several ways in which they believed schools play a part in students repeatedly being removed from mainstream schools. The participants also described what school factors they believed contributed to students not returning to the DAEP.

Theme 1: Structure and Supervision

The most mentioned theme that emerged from the study was school structure and supervision. All of the participants agreed that school structure was the key component that contributed to students being repeatedly sent to the DAEP. All participants equally expressed that if schools were more structured, students would have fewer opportunities to be involved in antisocial behaviors and break school rules and, in turn, would receive fewer referrals to the DAEP. All participants indicated that many of their students received referrals to the DAEP for misbehaving during passing periods when students were not being monitored. Participants 1, 3, 4, 6, and 8 shared similar stories about

students being suspended to the DAEP for getting into fights during passing periods. Participant 1 stated, "passing periods are so chaotic. Students are walking through the hallways from class to class, sometimes in groups, and it leaves room for anything to happen. A lot of times, there are several fights in the hallways per day." Participant 3 commented similarly by stating "our school needs more structure. The students should not be allowed to roam freely in the halls. We would have fewer fights if the students were escorted through the building during passing periods." Participants 4 and 6 both stated that students had more fights in the hallways than in classrooms because students were not being directly supervised during passing periods. Participant 8 gave a more detailed explanation about school structure:

> For one, there is not enough structure in the school. Middle schools need to be redesigned and structured like elementary schools. The reason there are so many fights during passing periods is because students are not monitored. For example, when the bell rings at the end of each class, students can just get up and leave for their next class. And that puts hundreds of students in the hallways at one time. Of course we, the teachers, can't see or hear everything that's going on. And the students know that. And that's when the potential for trouble is the greatest.

Participants 2, 5, and 7 agreed that fighting was a problem due to the lack of structure in the schools, but they offered explanations about other disciplinary infractions committed by students. Sharing similar beliefs with Participant 2, Participant 5 explained how students often times get together with their friends during passing periods and

partake in behaviors that are not permitted in school. The explanation Participant 5 gave about structure and student behavior was as follows:

> Kids hook up with their friends in between classes. Sometimes they decide to skip class. Nobody is there to make them go to class. They may go hang in the restroom or they may go hang outside behind the building. They go and smoke weed. Then they come back in the building high. If there was more structure, they wouldn't be able to skip class or leave out of the building. They definitely wouldn't be able to get high at school.

Likewise, Participant 7 said, "structure is definitely a problem. If we change the way we transition students, I bet we will lessen the amount of drugs being passed and used on campus."

Participants 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 agreed that some kids need structure in order to stay out of trouble, and they repeatedly got sent to the DAEP because that school environment was so structured. Participant 10 stated, "They want structure. Need it. Seek it. Even though they don't ask for it, they need it. It creates a safer environment. Makes them feel safer. If they have structure, they tend not to get in trouble." Participant 11 explained that a lot of the students who got sent to the DAEP were not troublemakers at the DAEP. Participant 11 said,

> Sometimes I wonder why some of the students have been sent there (to the DAEP) because they are such good students. They don't display the behaviors they were sent there for. But then I realize it's because they don't really have the opportunity to do those things because of the strict structure of the school (the

> DAEP). They don't get the chance to walk the halls between classes by themselves. They don't walk to lunch by themselves. They don't get to go anywhere by themselves. They are escorted by their teacher, in a straight line, anywhere they go outside of the classroom. They don't know it, but that's exactly the structure some kids need to function in. All schools in the district need to be like that.

Theme 2: Classroom/Behavior Management

The next most mentioned theme that emerged from the data was classroom and behavior management skills. Most of the participants agreed that because of the inadequate training they received in classroom and behavior management, they were quick to write a referral on a student. Participant 7 was passionate about not ever being required to take a training class or professional development class pertaining to behavior management. Participant 7 stated,

> I have been a teacher for 12 years. And I have attended many professional development courses, but mainly content courses. The district does not really offer PD pertaining to classroom behavior. So you kind of just get in your classroom and learn as you go. Sometimes it gets tough when you have a classroom full of knuckleheads. So what else can you do besides write a referral on the ones causing the problems?

Participant 4 believed that the principal should make sure the staff received training about how to deal with behavior in the classroom. It was this participant's belief that the principal had discretion about some of the staff development provided at the campus

level. According to this participant, many teachers at the school shared that concern. Participant 4 stated, "if they want us to be better at managing our classrooms, then they should make sure we know how to do it." Participants 10 through 14 revealed similar feelings about campus level staff development. They all felt like campus staff development should be more relevant to their campus situation. Participant 10 believed that the principal should show more support to the teachers and staff by offering the type of training that teachers could actually benefit from. Participants 11 and 13 agreed that teachers at a behavior school could benefit more from training about behavior management as opposed to training about the curriculum. Participants 12 and 14 spoke about changes that needed to be made regarding campus staff development. Participant 12 stated,

> The principals expect us [teachers] to handle discipline problems in our classes on our own. But we never get any type of training. When we have campus staff development, it's always about something less relevant than dealing with student behavior. Instead of spending hours talking about writing lesson objectives, they should have 'an expert' giving us different strategies to use in our classrooms to handle student behavior. In my opinion, behavior management is more important than anything else when you work with the type of students we work with.

Participant 14 stated,

> We don't need to hear about some of the things they present to us in staff development. When we can't teach because kids are being disruptive on a daily basis; we need to be trained on how to handle the disruptions. We have teachers in

> our building who have excellent classroom management skills and they hardly ever have to write referrals. That's who we should be listening to in staff development. Those teachers should be presenting their techniques and strategies to us. They should be modeling for us. The principals really need to give us more training that will make a difference in our classrooms.

Participants 1 and 6 did not start their teaching careers in the district where this study took place. They both started their careers in one of the surrounding school districts, and they expressed that that district did provide behavior management training. Participant 1 stated that if it had not been for the training she received before coming into this district, she would write far more referrals than she did. Participant 6 similarly stated that the techniques he learned before coming to this district had helped him better manage student behaviors and thus write fewer office referrals. Participants 1 and 6 agreed that they were aware of some of the problems other teachers at their current school had in their classrooms with student behavior. They also agreed that they believed that the problems stemmed from a lack of behavior management training.

Theme 3: Class Size

Another theme that emerged from the data as a school factor that contributed to students repeatedly being sent to the DAEP was class size. The participants agreed that student behavior was influenced by how many students were in the class. They explained that the more students were in a classroom, the greater the potential for discipline problems. Sharing similar experiences with Participants 1 and 3, Participant 4 stated:

> The school is overcrowded, which makes the classes overcrowded. When you have twenty plus students in a class, the disruptive students are really going to disrupt class. It's hard to keep students focused when you have one or more students causing problems. So, disruptive students often get put out of class.

Participants 2, 6, and 7 were adamant that classes should not be larger than 10 to 15 students. They all expressed that more of the instructional period was used up for discipline than teaching when the classes had more than 15 students. These 3 participants also mentioned the disservice that excessive discipline problems in the classroom created for other students.

Participants 10 through 14 expounded on smaller class sizes and how they influenced student behavior. Each of these four participants believed that smaller class sizes enabled teachers to give more attention to each of their students, which decreased the opportunity for misbehavior. Participant 11 explained how some students liked attending the DAEP because the classes there were smaller than classes at the home schools. Participant 13 gave a similar account about smaller classes:

> Classes at the DAEP are not overcrowded. Actually, the classes are very small compared to the home school classes. Students tend to cope better in smaller classes than in larger classes because they can get more attention from teachers. Also, when there are fewer students in the classroom, teachers have more patience and tend to deal with behavior problems better. So quite naturally, students function better when they are at the DAEP. But when they go back to their home

> schools, they go back into the larger classes, and they get in trouble and are sent back to the DAEP all over again.

Theme 4: Student Labeling

The next theme that emerged from the data is student labeling. Student labeling refers to when a stigma is attached to a student. Students were often times labeled as bad students or troublemakers by teachers and administrators, and those students received discipline referrals for any infraction, no matter how serious or minute the infraction. Eleven of the 14 participants mentioned labeling in their response about what school factors they believed contributed to students being repeatedly sent to the DAEP. Participants similarly expressed that some students had a target on their backs. As stated by Participant 8, "teachers began writing referrals on certain students as soon as they returned from the DAEP." This same participant indicated it was like an unspoken agreement among teachers to try to get rid of a student who was known as a troublemaker. Participant 13 further elaborated about how quickly students who had been labeled returned to the DAEP:

> When students completed their time at the DAEP, they go back to their home school. Sometimes a student is back at the DAEP within two weeks. He or she will complete their time at the DAEP again, and then go back to the regular school. Before you know it, the student will be back at the DAEP one more time, within a month. So that's 2 referrals to the DAEP in the same semester. Then when it gets close to state testing time, you look up and the kid is back again. They send the "trouble makers" to the DAEP at testing time to try to avoid

> disruptions during testing. So that's already 3 times in the school year. The students who get labeled don't stand a chance being successful at the regular campus.

Most of the responses rendered by participants revealed that while labels were placed on students by teachers and administrators, students often times labeled themselves. The majority of the participants also shared that students tended to conform to the behaviors associated with the labels placed on them. According to Participants 1, 2, 5, and 6, when students were labeled as good kids, or smart kids, they acted as such and did not get into much trouble. In particular, Participant 5 stated "students who are labeled as motivated remain motivated and are encouraged to stay out of trouble." Conversely, Participant 4 stated that when students realized they had been labeled as a bad kid, they felt like they may as well display bad behaviors. Participant 9 had a similar response and shared,

> Negative labeling can discourage students from attending school regularly. They feel like they may as well stay home because the people at school don't think much of them anyway. Or when they do come to school, they are not fully engaged and they disrupt class and get in trouble.

The majority of participants felt like if negative labels were not placed on students, there would not be as many students sent to the DAEP repeatedly.

Theme 5: Extracurricula Activities

Theme 4, extracurricular activities, emerged as a factor that contributed to students not returning to the DAEP. Eleven of the 14 participants believed that

extracurricular activities were one of the factors that contributed to students not going to the DAEP at all, or repeatedly. Those participants believed that when students played sports, were on a team or in a club, they put forth more effort to stay out of trouble. Participants 4 and 7 were coaches at their schools, and they agreed that during football season they didn't have students going to the DAEP because they couldn't participate in regular school activities if they were enrolled in the DAEP. Participant 9 was an eighth grade sponsor and shared how she had heard students talk about staying out of trouble because they wanted to be able to go to the eighth grade prom with all of their friends. Another participant had a similar experience with a student who had actually attended the DAEP four years ago. This participant said a student told her "Miss I'm never coming back to this school (speaking of the DAEP)." The teacher asked why and the student went on to say "Because I'm suspended from cheerleading as long as I'm going here. And I can't even go and watch the game because I'm here." According to this participant, that student had not been back to the DAEP.

Teacher Factors

The participants also expressed teacher factors that contributed to students returning to the DAEP. One factor was mentioned by all of the participants as a factor that affected student behavior. The participants described several ways in which they believed teachers attitudes towards students played a part in students repeatedly being removed from mainstream classrooms and schools.

Theme 6: Teacher-Student Relationships

Another theme that was prevalent in participant responses was the relationship teachers had with students, or the lack thereof. Most of the participants mentioned that teachers are the second most influential people in students' lives, next to their parents. More than half of the participants agreed that teacher attitudes towards students affected student behavior. They believed that when teachers had positive attitudes towards students that would reduce the amount of disruptions in the classroom. Participant 6 stated, "When students have good relationships with teachers, they have more respect for the teacher and pay more attention in class." Participant 2 echoed Participant 6 by stating "when teachers respect the students, the students respect the teachers and there are fewer disruptions in the classroom." The participants believed that in classes where teachers had positive relationships with students, the students learned more, were more engaged, and there was more mutual respect. Participant 7 remembered working with a colleague a few years ago who really had a bad attitude about teaching, and towards the students. Participant 7 recalled how that teacher frequently had problems with the students in her classroom and would regularly send students to the office.

Participants 10 through 14 felt that they, as well as other teachers at their school, had a desire to develop positive relationships with all students. Participant 10 stated, "We do all we can to have good relationships with our students. We talk to them about more than just school." Participant 12 gave a similar account by saying, "Communication is important. You have to talk the students and let them know you care about them as a person, not just as a student." Participant 14 added, "We strive to grow close to our

students and affect their lives. They don't normally get that at the home schools because of the large number of students in each class. So we get personal with the students, and that tends to help with discipline issues in the classroom." Participant 11 explained how some students had confided that they liked the teachers at the DAEP better than the teachers at their home school because the teachers at the DAEP were nicer and treated them better than the teachers at the home school.

Discrepant Data

There was little evidence of discrepant data revealed in the research. Because the study relied on the perception of teachers, data indicated an array of opinions and experiences. However, one participants' response was the total opposite of the rest of the responses about how teacher-student relationships affected student behavior. This participant did not believe the nature of the student-teacher relationship contributed to how students behaved in class. According to this participant, students made the choice to behave the way they behaved regardless to teacher attitudes. Participant 8 stated:

> I do not think teacher-student relationships contribute to students returning to the DAEP. I believe student behavior is a choice. In my opinion, it doesn't matter how good or bad the teacher attitude is. It doesn't matter how close the teacher may try to be to the student. If a student decides to misbehave or be disruptive, that's what he or she is going to do. I know I've had a good relationship with several students who have misbehaved in my classroom. I think it's just the decision they make for whatever reason.

Case study research is intended to reveal individual experiences; consequently observing a slight discrepancy was anticipated, but not enough to warrant a severe concern in this theme.

Evidence of Quality

In order to insure quality in this study, one of the strategies used was member checking. Participants were individually emailed the transcription of their interview and identified themes to check for accuracy (Glesne, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010). I asked them to review the transcript to ensure the transcription represented a good interpretation of what they told me during the initial interview and to review the identified themes to ensure they resonated with them. I asked each participant to make any necessary changes or corrections and email the transcripts and themes back to me. All of the transcripts and themes were emailed back to me with little or no changes made which suggested I accurately analyzed the data.

Another strategy I used to increase the level of quality in this study was peer review. The purpose of the peer review was to reduce researcher bias (Lodico et al., 2010). Two recent doctoral graduates served as peer reviewers. To protect the privacy of the participants, I removed any information that could possibly be used to identify the participants from the transcripts prior to the peer reviewers receiving a copy. Both peer reviewers examined the interview transcripts to check for researcher bias, and they confirmed that I conveyed the experiences of the participants fairly and accurately (Creswell, 2013). If the reviewers found any bias, then I reviewed the transcripts to collect any issues related to data collection.

Finally, the last strategy that was used in this study to insure quality was using rich, thick descriptions to document the results. This strategy allows the reader to draw conclusions about the transferability of the study (Morse & McEvoy, 2014). Transferability was ensured through an extensive description of teacher opinions and perceptions. In addition, having 14 participants across four different schools is a strong sample, and also provides evidence of quality.

Summary

This section presented the findings of the study. Fourteen participants were purposefully selected and interviewed. The interview transcripts revealed major themes that represented the participants' experiences. The themes were presented along with participant's responses regarding each theme. Section 5 includes a discussion of the findings and their interpretations.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, case study was to attain awareness about why some students were repeatedly being sent to the DAEP. I used purposeful sampling to invite 14 middle school teachers, three middle school teachers from three middle schools and five middle school teachers from the DAEP in the district where the study took place. I interviewed each participant in a location of their choice. Twelve of the interviews took place in person, and the remaining two took place over the phone at the participant's request. I reviewed the interview transcripts to identify potential categories, themes, and patterns. Member checking was used with the participants to increase the trustworthiness of the study's findings. Transferability was ensured through rich, thick descriptions of teacher opinions and perceptions.

In this qualitative, case study, I investigated teacher perceptions about what was causing some students to be repeatedly sent to the DAEP. The one research question that led the direction of this study was the following: How do a select group of teachers describe why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP? I found major themes that represented the perceptions of 14 teachers about why some students were repeatedly sent to the DAEP. The data were separated into two categories: school factors and teacher factors. Five themes were developed during data analysis as school factors, and one theme emerged as a teacher factor for a total of six themes. The themes were school structure and supervision, classroom/behavior management, class size, student labeling, extracurricular activities, and teacher-student relationships.

Interpretation of Findings

The following themes were identified and aligned to the central research question: structure and supervision, classroom/behavior management, class size, student labeling, extracurricular activities, and teacher-student relationships. The analysis of these themes provided insight on how the participants believed that school and teacher factors contribute to students repeatedly being sent to the DAEP. The outcomes of the Central Research Question (CRQ) are presented in this section.

School Factors

School structure and supervision was the first theme that emerged from the data as a school factor. The participants referred to structure as the manner in which students moved throughout the schools as they entered the building, as they changed classes, and as they exited at the end of the school day. Structure was defined in the research as "the extent to which activities include clear expectations for how students should spend their time" (Rorie, Gottfredson, Cross, Wilson, & Connell, 2011, p. 105). All of the participants agreed that school structure was the key component that contributed to students being repeatedly sent to the DAEP. All participants equally expressed that if schools were more structured, the students would have fewer opportunities to be involved in antisocial behaviors and break school rules and would receive fewer referrals to the DAEP. All participants indicated that many of their students received referrals to the DAEP for misbehaving during passing periods when students were not being supervised. These findings are supported by researchers who found that when adolescents spend time

in situations that lack adequate supervision and structure, they may display less social control and become more deviant (Pauwels & Svensson, 2013; Turanovic & Pratt, 2012).

There is an association between delinquency and time spent with peers without adult supervision and in areas with low collective efficacy (Weerman, Bernasco, Bruinsma, & Pauwels, 2013; Wikstrom, Ceccato, Hardie, & Treiber, 2010). Participants in this study shared stories about students being suspended to the DAEP for getting into fights during passing periods. Participants also explained how students often times got together with their friends during passing periods and partook in behaviors that were not permitted in school, such as skipping class and smoking weed. Several participants agreed that some kids needed structure in order to stay out of trouble, and they repeatedly got sent to the DAEP because the DAEP school environment is so structured. Other researchers found that unstructured and unsupervised socializing with peers increased the probability of misbehavior for individuals and the school as a whole (Bradley & Inglis, 2012; Roettger & Swisher, 2011; Rorie et al., 2011).

Classroom/behavior management was the second theme that emerged from the data as a school factor that contributed to students returning to the DAEP. Most of the participants agreed that the reason why they were quick to write a referral on a student was because they did not receive training in classroom and behavior management. Several participants believed that the principal should make sure the staff received training about how to deal with behavior in the classroom. They all felt like campus staff development should be more relevant to their campus situation. The participants stated that the principal should show more support to the teachers and staff by offering the type

of training that teachers could benefit from. The DAEP teachers all agreed that teachers at a behavior school could benefit more from training about behavior management as opposed to training about the curriculum. Two participants started their teaching careers in another district that did provide behavior management training. Those two participants stated that the techniques they learned before coming to this district had helped them better manage student behaviors and thus write fewer office referrals.

The findings regarding classroom/behavior management skills correlated with the findings of several studies found in the literature. According to Boyd (2012), it is imperative for teachers and administrators to take the responsibility to ensure that a consistent school wide system for preventing disruptive behavior on school grounds is in place. Everyone within the school setting is "expected to model and encourage appropriate behavior" (Goodwin & Miller, 2012, p. 82). Other researchers suggested that training for new teachers should begin during their preservice instruction and should include multiple approaches that will enable them to be successful from the beginning of their careers (Polat, Kaya, & Akdag, 2013). However, teacher training must be aligned with teacher goals in order for teacher training to be successful (Young, Caldarella, Richardson, & Young, 2012). Lane, Menzies, Bruhn and Crnobori (2011) maintained that often times teachers have not been adequately trained in how to apply behavior strategies once they are given to them to use. Teacher professional development is employed with no real connection to what the teachers are doing in the daily classroom environment (van Aldereen-Smeets & van der Molen, 2015). In addition, school administrators need to collaborate with teachers and come to an agreement about how the school defines

discretionary discipline and which behaviors would and would not deserve a discipline referral (MacNeil & Prater, 2010).

Class size was the third theme that emerged from the data as a school factor that contributed to students repeatedly being sent to the DAEP. The participants agreed that student behavior was influenced by the how many students were the in class. The participants explained that the more students were in a classroom, the greater the potential for discipline problems. Small classes have a positive effect on student behavior (Bahanshal, 2013; McKee, Sims, & Rivkin, 2015; Njoroge & Nyabuto, 2014). Three of the participants were adamant that classes should not be larger than 10 to 15 students. They all expressed that more of the instructional period was consumed with disciplining students than teaching when the classes have more than 15 students. As more students are enrolled in the class, the amount of discipline issues increases (Huber, 2012). Larger classes—22 to 25 students—were harder for teachers to manage than smaller classes—13 to 17 students (Harfitt, 2013). More student misbehavior occurs in the larger classes, resulting in more time being spent on controlling the students rather than teaching (Zyngier, 2014). All three of these participants also mentioned the disservice that this creates for other students. All five of the DAEP teachers believed that smaller class sizes enable teachers to give more attention to each of their students, which decreases the opportunity for misbehavior.

Several participants of this study reported that classes are overcrowded because of the excessive number of students enrolled in the schools; therefore, more students are removed from classrooms and eventually sent to the DAEP. This finding is in agreement

with the findings of Hemphill, Plenty, Herrenkohl, Toumbourou, and Catalano (2014) and Theriot, Craun, and Dupper (2010) who conveyed that school level factors, including school size, were related to school suspension. In addition, small school environments lead to a more positive school climate and decreased incidents of suspension and expulsion (Goldkind & Farmer, 2013).

Student labeling was the fourth theme that emerged from the data. Eleven of the 14 participants initially mentioned labeling in their response about what school factors they believed contributed to students being repeatedly sent to the DAEP. DAEPs established by public school districts are often negatively labeled as dumping grounds or warehouses for students with behavioral issues (Kim & Taylor, 2008; Morrissette, 2011). The participants believed that students were given negative labels by teachers and administrators, and those students received discipline referrals for any infraction, no matter how serious or minute the infraction. These findings are in agreement with the findings of previous researchers who found that students returning to the DAEP are burdened with negative labels like troublemaker and problem student from teachers and principals (Greene, 2010; Theriot, Craun, & Dupper, 2010). Participants similarly expressed that some students come to have a *target on their backs* and that teachers begin writing referrals on those students as soon as they return to the regular school from the DAEP in order to get them sent back to the DAEP. Greene stated that teachers and administrators can name the students who are targeted and labeled, and those students are often referred to as "frequent flyers." The students identified as frequent flyers justified their continued infractions as a response to teachers negative labeling (Kennedy-Lewis &

Murphy, 2016). Similarly, the majority of the participants shared that students tended to conform to the behaviors associated with the labels placed on them; therefore, when students realize they had been labeled as a bad kid, they felt like they may as well display bad behaviors. The majority of participants also felt like if negative labels were not placed on students, there would not be as many students sent to the DAEP repeatedly. Catalano and Hawkins' (1996) SDM, the conceptual framework of the study, mentioned children learning patterns of behavior from their social environment.

Extracurricular activities, the fifth theme, emerged as a school factor that contributed to students not returning to the DAEP. Eleven of the 14 participants believed that participating in extracurricular activities was one of the factors that contributed to students not going to the DAEP at all, or repeatedly. According to Fredricks (2011), when students regularly participate in extracurricular activities, they will achieve higher grades, better scores on assessments, and more positive education experiences in general. Belonging to extracurricular groups is important for "providing access to the relationships and networks that influence positive outcomes for students" (Shulruf, 2010, p. 595). In addition, 11 of the participants believed that when students play sports, are on a team or in a club, they put forth more effort to stay out of trouble. All of the participants agreed that students who take part in extracurricular activities put forth more effort to stay out of trouble because they cannot attend or participate in any school or district activity—whether on or off the school campus—if they are attending the DAEP. In their study, Veliz and Shakib (2012) examined the association between sports participation and

delinquency in schools and determined that a low percentage of major crimes and suspensions took place in schools with higher interscholastic sports participation.

Individuals become attached to the people that they consistently associate with and committed to the activities they consistently participate in (Kim, Oesterle, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2015). The SDM further claims that the individual will conform to the prosocial or antisocial behaviors, standards, and beliefs held by the people or institutions that the individual is attached to (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). All 14 participants in this study alleged that if more students participated in extracurricular activities, there would be fewer student referrals to the DAEP. When students participate in extracurricular activities, they become attached to the other members in their activity and display acceptable behaviors.

Teacher Factors

Teacher-student relationships emerged as a teacher factor that contributed to students being sent to the DAEP. Most of the participants mentioned that teachers were the second most influential people in students' lives, next to their parents. As hypothesized in the social development model, adolescents who feel attached to teachers tend not to socialize with deviant peers in order to maintain their relationships with school staff and other students who are bonded to school (Sullivan & Hirschfield, 2011). Being attached to teachers can be understood as having a positive rapport with teachers.

More than half of the participants agreed that teacher attitudes towards students affected student behavior. School leaders' feelings about discipline are factors in forecasting suspensions (Skiba et al., 2012). The participants also agreed that when

teachers had positive attitudes towards students, there would be fewer disruptions in the classroom. Lee et al. (2011) stated that because of the perceptions some teachers have about Black males, those students get suspended from mainstream schools more often than other students. The participants of this study conveyed that when teachers have positive attitudes towards students, the amount of classroom disruptions is reduced, which reduces the number of students removed from the classroom.

Almost all of the participants believed that in classes where teachers had positive relationships with students, the students learned more, were more engaged, and there was more mutual respect. Caring and sustained relationships between teachers and students reduce discipline problems (Elias, 2009; Sterrett, 2012). Middle school students must see the school as a fair and just place where they can be supported when a social or educational problem arises (Bates et al., 2011). In addition, Mati (2011) identified the significance of a constructive relationship between teachers and students in influencing positive choices regarding behavior.

The DAEP teachers felt that they, as well as other teachers at their school, had a desire to develop positive relationships with all students. They stated that they talked to students about more than just school. The DAEP teachers also stated that students had shared how they liked the DAEP teachers better than the home school teachers because of the closeness of the relationship. In an investigation of the effectiveness of DAEPs, Weiland (2012) discovered that the level of perceived care for the students who have been assigned to a DAEP was paramount for student success Weiland argued that those same qualities of care must be practiced in the regular home campuses of at-risk students.

While Elias (2009), Sterrett (2012), Bates et al. (2011) and Weiland (2012) did not refer to the nature of teacher-student relationships using the exact same terms as the participants in my study, the overall views are the same. The researchers used the words care and caring as they reported results about teacher-student relationships. As conveyed in Section 4, the participants of this study used the terms and phrases positive relationships, good relationships, respect, and positive attitudes.

One participant felt the opposite of all the others about how teacher-student relationships affected student behavior. This participant did not believe the relationship between teachers and students contributed to how students behaved in class. According to this participant, students made the choice to behave the way they behaved regardless to teacher attitudes.

School and teacher factors contribute to students being repeatedly sent to the DAEP. All of the participants agreed that school structure was the key component that contributed to students being removed from regular schools due to a lack of supervision during passing periods. Administrators at the home schools could implement a policy similar to what is used in elementary schools that requires teachers to escort students from class to class. In addition, administrators could increase supervision by requiring teachers and other school staff to be outside of the classrooms while students are transitioning from class to class. Reducing the amount of times students are without supervision may decrease the amount of unacceptable behavior that causes students to be sent to the DAEP.

According to the participants, the larger the class size, the greater the potential for disruptive behavior. School administrators could allow other teachers and staff (such as substitutes, instructional specialists, special education teachers, and elective teachers) to coteach with core content teachers to help reduce the amount of discipline problems in larger classes. Administrators could also provide teachers with teacher assistants to assist with behavior in larger classes.

When students returned to their home schools from the DAEP, they were placed back in the same situation they were originally in. Administrators could ensure that students are given a different schedule when they re-enroll at the home school in order to avoid the teachers who have already labeled them as trouble makers.

District leaders and school administrators could use these findings to assist teachers with improving their classroom management skills, and teachers should concentrate on improving their attitudes toward students and improving teacher-student relationships. Continual professional development for teachers may help them with reducing discipline referrals, which would reduce the number of suspensions to the DAEP. These applications of the findings of this qualitative study possibly will bring awareness to researchers, policymakers, school districts, and the community.

Implications for Social Change

It is imperative for middle school teachers and leaders to collaboratively work to help middle school students be more successful in mainstream schools. The results of this study provided an understanding of what teachers believe to be some school and teacher factors that contributed to students being repeatedly sent to the DAEP. Making changes

to the school environment may assist with reducing the number of opportunities for students to exhibit antisocial behaviors in hallways and classrooms, which would result in less student discipline referrals. Providing teachers with classroom management training might contribute to improved teacher-student relationships and may ultimately result in teachers writing fewer discipline referrals on students. Therefore, if teachers write a smaller amount of student discipline referrals, a greater number of students can be more successful in regular classrooms and fewer students will be sent to the DAEP. Research has revealed that youths who attend DAEPs are likelier to experience school failure (Kralevich et al., 2010) and drop out of school (Cole & Heilig, 2011). Thus, if fewer students receive referrals to the DAEP, there will be a reduction in school failure and school dropout rates. A reduction in school failure and dropout rates can assist a greater number of adolescents to become productive citizens of society once they graduate from high school.

Recommandations for Action

District leaders could make changes to the district discipline policy in order to assist principals and teachers with discipline problems. Making changes to the current discipline policy could help identify necessary staff development trainings for teachers and principals around the district. Principals could assess the discipline policies that are currently in place at their schools to consist of alternative strategies to reduce the number of student discipline referrals. Middle school teachers could provide the principals with valuable feedback in regards to the assessment of alternative strategies to reduce the

number of student discipline referrals. All stakeholders could benefit from being aware of alternative strategies to reduce student discipline referrals.

The results of the study conveyed that school structure was one of the school factors that contributed to students being repeatedly sent to the DAEP. All of the teachers mentioned that students frequently displayed behaviors that were not permitted by the student code of conduct during passing periods when supervision was minimal. One recommendation would be for middle school administrators to implement transition procedures in the schools. Teachers could be required to escort their students, as a class, whenever they have to move from one location to another. Teachers could also be required to escort their students out of the building when school is dismissed. The students are in need of more supervision during passing periods in order to reduce the possibility of students displaying antisocial behaviors. I recommend that all middle schools in the district implement transition procedures and increase supervision in the hallways during passing periods in order to improve school structure and reduce the number of students being sent to the DAEP.

The findings of this study will be distributed to the participants of the study via email. I will also distribute the findings of the study with the principals of each of the three middle schools via email. I will meet with the principal of my school to determine when I can present the results to the school staff. In addition, I will contact the president of the school board to determine a date in which I can discuss the study with the school board, the superintendent, and other stakeholders at a school board meeting.

Recommandations for Further Study

I recommend a quantitative study be conducted instead of a qualitative one. A quantitative study would yield statistical data regarding student discipline referrals to the DAEP. In addition, I recommend a qualitative investigation supported by a survey be conducted with a larger number of participants to determine if the factors would be the same, and whether race is significant or not. While this study represents the perspectives of teachers, it could be replicated using the perspectives of students. Using students as participants may result in more reliable results. Parents' perspectives could also provide trustworthy input regarding teacher-student relationships, the school climate, and how students feel about school.

I also recommend a study of this type be conducted in a different area. This research was conducted in a school district in north central Texas using middle school teachers as participants. It is recommended a similar investigation be completed with middle and high school teachers, as well as students on this level, in other locations. The results of these studies can be used to compare the perspectives of teacher participants and middle and high school students as participants.

Reflection

Getting to this point has been a long and tedious experience. For a number of years, I did not put forth the amount of effort needed to make significant progress on my study. But once I started to apply myself, I realized that I was actually interested in my topic and began to see my study develop into a meaningful investigation. Although I was sometimes frustrated by the research process, I am satisfied with what I have been able to

accomplish. Once I completed the literature review phase of the study, I began to feel like I had a purpose and I was determined to complete what I felt like was some much need research.

When I first decided what my topic of research would be, I already had some preconceived notions and ideas about what the results would indicate. From the beginning of my teaching career at the DAEP, I have believed that the home schools need to make some changes to the school environments to make them more conducive to student success. As it turns out, all of the participants in the study believe some of the same things that I believe. I was not surprised to hear all of the participants say that schools need to be more structured. However I did not reveal to any of the participants that their responses were in line with my thoughts. I have also believed for a long time that teacher's lack of classroom management skills is the reason why so many students repeatedly return to the DAEP. Again, I did not voice any of my opinions to the participants. I was determined not to let my biases influence the results of the study in any way, so I kept all of my personal thoughts to myself.

The interview process for this study was easier than I had anticipated it would be. Because I asked questions about teacher factors that may be associated with DAEP referrals, I was not sure if the participants would withhold information or not. But the participants were more than willing to share their beliefs about why some students are repeatedly sent to the DAEP. They were very easy to talk to. Each interview felt like a regular conversation with a work colleague as opposed to an interview with a participant in a study. It seemed as if participating in the study made each of them feel important and

I felt happy about that. Gaining an understanding of teacher perspectives can positively affect social change in discipline procedures and enlighten schools and school districts about how to assist students to be more successful in mainstream schools and eventually become productive members of society.

Concluding Statement

The results of this qualitative case study indicated that several school and teacher factors contributed to students being repeatedly sent to the DAEP. The participants agreed that school structure, school size, student labeling, and extracurricular activities were facets of the school environment that negatively affected student behavior. The participants also agreed that the lack of teacher behavior/classroom management skills and teacher-student relationships were negatively associated with student behavior. These results demonstrated a need for changes to the school environments as well as a need for ongoing teacher training. While addressing these issues may not eliminate the problem with student discipline all together, it is a place for schools and school districts to start the process of decreasing the amount of discipline referrals students are receiving. Reducing student discipline referrals will result in a reduction of referrals to the DAEP and allow students to be more successful in mainstream classrooms. Providing students the opportunity to be successful in regular schools will increase the chances of them being successful later in life.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

For Home School Teachers:

1. What are your thoughts about why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP, while other students are not?
2. In your opinion, what home school factors contribute to students returning to the DAEP?
3. One factor you mentioned in answer to the last question was (_____). Please explain how (_____) contributes to students returning to the DAEP. (This question will be asked with regard to each factor given in response to question 2).
4. Do you think (_____) contributes to students returning to the DAEP? Why or why not? (If the participant doesn't mention a school factor that several other participants mentioned.)
5. In your opinion, what home school factors contribute to students not returning to the DAEP?
6. One factor you mentioned in answer to the last question was (_____). Please explain how (_____) contributes to students not returning to the DAEP. (This question will be asked with regard to each factor given in response to question 5).
7. Do you think (_____) contributes to students not returning to the DAEP? Why or why not? (If the participant doesn't mention a home school factor that several other participants mentioned.)

8. In your opinion, what home school teacher factors contribute to students returning to the DAEP?
9. One factor you mentioned in answer to the last question was (_____). Please explain how (_____) contributes to students returning to the DAEP. (This question will be asked with regard to each factor given in response to question 8).
10. In your opinion, what home school teacher factors contribute to students not returning to the DAEP?
11. One factor you mentioned in answer to the last question was (_____). Please explain how (_____) contributes to students not returning to the DAEP. (This question will be asked with regard to each factor given in response to question 10).
12. Do you think (_____) contributes to students not returning to the DAEP? Why or why not? (If the participant doesn't mention a home school teacher factor that several other participants mentioned.)
13. What do you think the DAEP should do differently to prevent students from returning to the DAEP? Please explain.
14. What else would you like to say concerning this topic?

For Alternative School Teachers:

1. What are your thoughts about why some students are repeatedly being sent to the DAEP, while others are not?

2. In your opinion, what DAEP school factors contribute to students returning to the DAEP?
3. One factor you mentioned in answer to the last question was (_____). Please explain how (_____) contributes to students returning to the DAEP. (This question will be asked with regard to each factor given in response to question 2).
4. Do you think (_____) contributes to students returning to the DAEP? Why or why not? (If the participant doesn't mention a school factor that several other participants mentioned.)
5. In your opinion, what DAEP school factors contribute to students not returning to the DAEP?
6. One factor you mentioned in answer to the last question was (_____). Please explain how (_____) contributes to students not returning to the DAEP. (This question will be asked with regard to each factor given in response to question 5).
7. Do you think (_____) contributes to students not returning to the DAEP? Why or why not? (If the participant doesn't mention a home school factor that several other participants mentioned.)
8. In your opinion, what DAEP school teacher factors contribute to students returning to the DAEP?
9. One factor you mentioned in answer to the last question was (_____). Please explain how (_____) contributes to students returning to the

DAEP. (This question will be asked with regard to each factor given in response to question 8).

10. In your opinion, what DAEP school teacher factors contribute to students not returning to the DAEP?
11. One factor you mentioned in answer to the last question was (_____). Please explain how (_____) contributes to students not returning to the DAEP. (This question will be asked with regard to each factor given in response to question 10).
12. Do you think (_____) contributes to students not returning to the DAEP? Why or why not? (If the participant doesn't mention a home school teacher factor that several other participants mentioned.)
13. What do you think the home schools should do differently to prevent students from returning to the DAEP? Please explain.
14. What else would you like to say concerning this topic?